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President: Mr. Gurirab . . . . . (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 33

Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/259)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.11)

The President: I call on Mr. Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada, President of the National Assembly of People's Power of Cuba, to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.11.

Mr. Alarcón de Quesada (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): In seven consecutive years the General Assembly has adopted by a large majority seven resolutions similar to the one I now have the honour to introduce, clearly establishing the need to put an end to the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States against Cuba. They have all been ignored. Instead of complying with them, in that same period Washington has enacted two laws, numerous amendments and executive and legislative provisions extending and intensifying a policy that has been rejected by the international community.

On 13 April this year, a Cuban-European corporation was arbitrarily deprived of its rights by a United States court that was forced to take such action by an amendment surreptitiously appended to the 1999 appropriations bill. International agreements on trademarks and patents have thus become the most recent victims of a policy that is as insolent as it is irresponsible.

Nor has Washington respected its own commitments. It promised to partially modify some secondary aspects of the most offensive of its laws — at least those having to do with the denial of visas to foreign business executives investing in Cuba — but it has done absolutely nothing in this regard. On the contrary, not long before this meeting, it published threats against several companies from Europe and other countries. These actions directly and explicitly contradict the widely publicized agreement with the European Union and also constitute an escalation in the application of the so-called Helms-Burton Act because, in this case, Washington is acting on behalf of persons who were not American citizens when their properties were nationalized.

The resolutions have been ignored and understandings have been violated. At the same time, that country is carrying out a dishonest campaign aimed at creating confusion and at perpetuating its unacceptable conduct, which goes against the legal and ethical obligations that all States must respect. Pressure and manoeuvres intended to thwart the actions of the Assembly have multiplied this year.

Letters have been sent from Washington and other moves have been made urging Member States to vote against the draft resolution introduced by Cuba. I am not

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revealing any secrets. I am sure the Assembly is familiar with the text of those communications signed by senior State Department officials. I have three of them here with me. These letters are examples of arrogance and a lack of respect for the dignity of the Member States and the intelligence of their representatives. The Organization's largest debtor — the country that is mainly responsible for the Organization's financial crisis because it has not paid its meagre assessment while it reaps the greatest benefits from the income obtained from the United Nations and all its Members by virtue of the privilege of being the host country — not only ignores the repeated decisions of the Assembly, but insults it with its presumptuousness and lies.

How can they say at this time that there is no blockade, that "the embargo is a bilateral issue" and that "its regulations apply only to persons or entities subject to United States jurisdiction"?

Who do they think they are fooling? If this is so, why have other countries that are trade partners of the United States been forced to adopt specific regulations to protect themselves from its extraterritorial intentions? Why has it been necessary to resort to the World Trade Organization? Why has there been a majority vote in the Assembly every year? Or are they perhaps trying to tell us that all persons and entities on the planet are subject to Washington's jurisdiction?

This letter not only is an offence to the international community, it also mocks the American people and their elected officials. It does so when it says without the least bit of shame that the Government of the United States is "facilitating greatly the export of U.S. medicines and medical supplies to Cuba, and permitting food sales".

After thoroughly considering the matter, the American Association for World Health refuted this utterly cynical falsehood by concluding that the "embargo's restrictions signify the deliberate blockading of the Cuban population's access to food and medicine".

If there is a shred of truth in the State Department's fallacy, why do American farmers protest and demand specifically to be allowed to sell their products to Cuba? Why did 70 senators strive unsuccessfully to put an end to this prohibition? Or is the United States Senate also unworthy of the respect of Washington bureaucrats?

In the letter they have circulated, they claim that the purpose of the blockade is "to restore freedom and democracy in Cuba", and they attempt to slander our country by accusing it of alleged human rights violations. This comes from a Government that with its economic war denies all Cubans — including children, sick people, the elderly and women — essential food and necessary medicines to save lives or relieve pain; a Government that supported Batista's dictatorship to the very end and that trained, armed and advised the henchmen and torturers who murdered 20,000 Cubans; a Government that attacks the Cuban people because it has never forgiven them for defeating tyranny and reaching full liberation through their heroic struggle.

The American document also omits some important details. It fails to mention that Washington shamelessly interferes in Cuba's internal affairs and that it organizes, promotes and finances subversive actions intended to undermine Cuban society and overthrow its Government. All of this it proclaims openly.

For example, a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) press release lists in detail the funds spent on these activities during the first eight months of 1999, which total $6,111,000. This amount, which was budgeted under section 109 of the Helms-Burton Act, represents only a small percentage of the resources that have been overtly used against Cuba. Another $22 million was allocated this year for illegal radio and television broadcasts. This is federal budget money which is directly and openly supplied by Government agencies, to which we would have to add those funds that are indirectly handed out through seemingly private agencies.

We can only imagine the amount of money, which is certainly considerable, that is secretly channelled through the Central Intelligence Agency, to which reference is made in section 115 of that same Act, or the funds that are earmarked, under section 108, for secretly gathering information on the Cuban economy and the activities of foreign companies there. These provisions serve as a basis for the punitive measures that Washington takes against the executives of those companies and their relatives, on which the Administration regularly reports to Congress — confidentially, of course.

Freedom and democracy are not the exclusive property of the United States, and its Government has no reason to claim them as its own. No one has empowered it to decide what the political and social organization of other countries should be, and Cuba is not, and will never again be, its colony. The economic warfare against

Cuba began at precisely the moment when the Cubans overthrew the Batista dictatorship, which was a loyal ally and servile instrument of the United States. The real purpose of this policy is to wrest from us the freedom and democracy we struggled so long and hard to win. The real goal of the blockade is to divest Cubans of their country, appropriate their lands, their homes, their schools and their hospitals, and subject them once again to United States domination. These are the real purposes of the blockade, as the infamous Helms-Burton Act states quite clearly.

Inevitably, this policy also has a negative effect on the sovereign rights of other countries, because from its first day and throughout its four decades, the blockade has continuously and systematically attacked the very foundations of civilization through its most sacred principle: the right to life of an entire nation.

Since 1959, the objective of the United States has been, and still is, to destroy the Cuban people. This is genocide, plain and simple. For four decades the blockade has been deliberately sustained against the Republic of Cuba and all of its people, bringing illness, death, pain and suffering to millions of Cubans, the victims of a policy that continues to be in force. The guilty parties should be punished under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which was adopted on 9 December 1948. No matter how much they try to hide it, there is more than enough irrefutable evidence, and recently declassified official documents offer additional proof.

On 1 January 1959, even before the revolutionary government was in place, the first blow was dealt to the national economy, when the persons who had plundered the Treasury escaped to the United States under the protection of that country. They took with them $424 million — the country's only reserves. This money has never been returned to Cuba.

Not only did they gain control of these Cuban assets, but, on 12 February of that same year, the Washington Government decided not to grant any loans to Cuba, not even the very modest one that was requested to support the Cuban currency, which had been the victim of this brutal robbery.

The economic war against Cuba began before the adoption of the first revolutionary measure, and long before the Cuban revolution was proclaimed a socialist one. From the very beginning, the war was, as it continues to be today, directed against the Cuban nation, against its independence and against all the Cuban people.

In a United States State Department memorandum dated 24 June 1959, the essence of the policy already being implemented against Cuba was clearly set forth. It considered depriving Cuba of its quota in the United States sugar market, so that

> "the sugar industry would promptly suffer an abrupt and immediate decline, causing widespread further unemployment. The large numbers of persons thus forced out of work would begin to go hungry."

At the same meeting, United States Secretary of State Herter defined these initial steps as "measures of economic warfare". Another document, drafted on 6 April 1960 and approved that same day, expanded the aggression even further and was even more specific:

> "Every possible means should be undertaken promptly to weaken the economic life of Cuba...to bring about hunger, desperation and the overthrow of the Government."

A genocidal strategy was put into effect that has now lasted for four decades. Three generations of Cubans have suffered its consequences: two thirds of the current Cuban population were born after it came into effect and have lived their entire lives under it. The Cuban people have had to suffer, survive and pursue their development under totally unfair and unjustifiable conditions, imposed in the most cold-blooded and calculated manner by the most powerful nation on earth, which is thereby seeking to destroy the Cuban nation and exterminate its people.

The blockade has been implemented by nine United States Administrations. They have enforced it through laws, regulations and by-laws in violation of both law and morality; they have attempted to force other nations to comply with it, thereby trampling on their sovereignty and destroying international norms; they have threatened and oppressed citizens of the United States and other countries; and they have pressured and bribed people everywhere, attempting to deceive and manipulate the entire world.

This blockade has always been extraterritorial in nature, because it seeks to rob Cuba of its independence, trample on the sovereignty of other countries and punish the entire Cuban population with deliberate cruelty. That is the way it has always been, from the very first day, 40

years ago. For confirmation of that fact, we need only examine the provisions contained in the Cuban Assets Control Regulations, which have been in effect since 8 July 1963. They include numerous illegal measures that interfere with the legitimate economic and commercial activities of foreign companies based outside United States jurisdiction, as well as complete prohibitions not only against the Republic of Cuba, but against all Cuban nationals, without exception, residing in Cuban territory, who are prevented from engaging in any transactions, while all of their property, deposits, savings, inheritances and pensions in the United States have been confiscated.

The United States authorities have used innumerable methods in carrying out with impunity the abominable crime they are committing against my people. They have had no qualms about lying to this very Assembly, as they will surely do once again today.

It was very recently demonstrated beyond any doubt that this genocidal policy has not been modified and that those who are implementing it are prepared to do anything to prolong it indefinitely. Last August, by a vote of 70 to 28, the United States Senate voted in favour of including an amendment in the agricultural appropriations bill aimed at revising the policy of unilateral economic sanctions imposed by Washington on other countries by eliminating the prohibitions relating to food and medicine. While the United States Senate was promoting this initiative, Cuba became the only country in the world to which the United States unilaterally prohibits the sale of food and medicine. On 27 July the United States lifted its prohibition against Iran, Libya and the Sudan, and on 17 September the prohibition against the People's Democratic Republic of Korea was removed.

Despite its wide support in the Senate, the amendment was not included in the text of the bill that was finally adopted. In order to eliminate the proposal, voting was blocked in the Senate/House conference committee, which was arbitrarily shut down in violation of the usual legislative practices and procedures of that country. A considerable number of United States lawmakers protested and denounced the unusual situation that forced them to adopt a text that did not represent the interests of the majority. What led to that unprecedented action? Senators Ashcroft and Brownback and Representative Nethercutt, the authors of the amendment, signed a statement, which was published on 20 October in *The Washington Times*, in which they explained why the vote on the amendment was blocked. They said that the reason — the sole reason — was the belief that "The unilateral food and medicine embargo against Cuba must be maintained at any cost."

A few days ago, on 5 November, William Clinton himself acknowledged that the decision to deny those products to Cuba had been the only reason for what happened in Congress. Curiously, on that same day, when speaking before a different audience, the President of the United States insisted on keeping the blockade in place and tried to justify it, although he had to admit that almost everybody rejected it.

The group that controls the leadership of the United States Congress went so far as to break with democratic procedures in its determination to continue depriving the Cuban people of food and medicine; they are now the only people on earth against whom Washington is unilaterally applying such a criminal policy — a practice that half a century ago was prohibited, even in time of war, by the Geneva Conventions. As if that were not enough, by prohibiting its subsidiaries abroad from trading — their sales in food and medicine totalled more than $700 million — Washington is forcing others to collude in this crime.

In order to ensure a total prohibition on exports of food and medicine to Cuba, they have turned a deaf ear to the demands of farmers and other sectors of United States society and have disregarded the views of most of their lawmakers. To deny the Cuban people access to food and medicine from the United States, the perpetrators of this genocide have even resorted to this "affront" — to borrow the term used by the congressmen to whom I referred earlier — to their own legislative procedures.

What happened in the case of the Ashcroft amendment proves that the blockade completely prevents exports of food and medicine to Cuba. If there were any truth to the official United States propaganda, there would have been no need for such an amendment, for the votes in favour cast by 70 senators or for the clumsy scheming to exclude the amendment from the final text of the bill. By thwarting its approval, the supporters of the blockade have defied the opinion of Congress while revealing their determination to maintain the most cruel and condemnable aspects of a clearly genocidal policy.

While acknowledging the noble intentions inspiring those who strove to introduce this reform into current United States policy, I have to say that even if it had been adopted, it would have made little difference; nor

would it have made the blockade any less cruel and inhumane. How could we acquire food and medicine on the United States market while a harsh blockade is maintained, denying us the resources we need for development and preventing normal trade with the United States, a country which is also trying to sabotage our trade with the rest of the world?

The blockade has created countless obstacles to Cuba's economic development; it has made it impossible for Cuba to acquire products, equipment, goods, services and technology; it has deprived it of funding and credits; it has inflicted severe damage on its foreign trade by depressing the prices of what we sell and raising the costs of imports and transportation; it has affected every sector of the national economy, with severe consequences for the living conditions of our people.

United States bureaucrats and diplomats have tirelessly dedicated themselves to tracking down, throughout the world, every gram of Cuban nickel or sugar that might be contained in some foreign product in order to ban it from the United States market, and to preventing the sale to Cuba of any foreign product that contains so much as a particle of United States origin. This is the entirety of the blockade that must be completely, totally and unconditionally lifted.

The Government that it is my honour to represent is prepared to undertake every legal action to fight the blockade and to defend the rights of its people. In this connection, I am officially announcing to the General Assembly that we shall be filing a lawsuit against the Government of the United States for compensation in the amount of over $100 billion for the enormous damages caused to the people of Cuba by the blockade, which has now lasted over 40 years, since it actually began in 1959 with the first economic measures taken against our country.

Cuba has never capitulated and never shall. Despite the tightening of the blockade and the acts of aggression, it has succeeded in halting the downslide of its economy and has begun a process of sustained and irreversible recovery.

The capacity for resistance of its heroic, self-sacrificing and noble people is founded on a unity and a patriotism that nothing and no one will ever be able to destroy. Our people have travelled a long and hazardous road in their endless struggle for independence and justice. They know that the road ahead will not be easy either, but they march on, full of confidence, because they believe in the value of principles, and because they know that their cause is just and that it transcends the borders of their small territory.

They also believe in international solidarity, in equality and fraternity among peoples and in the political and moral strength of the General Assembly, in whose voice they trust.

Mr. Tello (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Faithful to its history and to its national character, Mexico is a country committed to peace, justice and equality. The principles of the United Nations Charter and of international law guide our relations with other States. This is enshrined in the political Constitution of the Republic of Mexico.

That is why Mexico has not promulgated or implemented extraterritorial legal provisions. My Government reaffirms that measures such as the so-called Helms-Burton Act are unacceptable under international law and run counter to the purposes and principles to which we all committed ourselves by ratifying the Charter of the United Nations.

In each of the past seven years, the General Assembly, by an overwhelming majority, has called on States to refrain from promulgating and applying laws that have extraterritorial effects. It will do so today for the eighth time. This appeal, which embodies the dictates of reason, law and ethics, must not continue to be ignored. That is required by the harmony that must prevail in relations among all members of the international community.

Today, as never before in the history of mankind, the challenges of globalization make it clear that we will be able to make progress towards higher levels of peace and development only through genuine international cooperation founded on full respect for the sovereignty of all nations and on commitments undertaken under international law.

The embargo against Cuba must end. My country has always rejected the unilateral imposition of coercive measures in international relations. We must without delay overcome this relic of another time, for it has no *raison d'être* in the new millennium that we must build together. Only if we are united, if we respect our differences and if we are enriched by our diversity, and only through dialogue, will we be able to realize the hopes of the founders of the Organization and achieve a

fully human world that is a concrete reflection of our shared aspirations for peace, justice and equality.

Mexico will continue a high level of cooperation and economic and trade exchanges with Cuba, a sister nation with which we are linked by ties of history, geography and culture.

In accordance with our unswerving principles, the delegation of Mexico will vote in favour of the draft resolution contained in document A/54/L.11.

Mr. Mra (Myanmar): First of all, I would like to express my delegation's appreciation for the Secretary-General's report contained in document A/54/259, dated 18 August 1999, on agenda item 33, entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba". The report, which reproduces the replies from Governments and from organs and agencies of the United Nations, amply demonstrates that the international community is opposed to the extraterritorial application of national legislation which violates the universally accepted principles of international law.

Over the past several years the General Assembly has already adopted by a growing majority, seven resolutions under this item, calling for an end to the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States against Cuba. During the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, resolution 53/4 was adopted by an overwhelming majority of 157 votes in favour, which clearly underscores the international community's rejection of the application of unilateral and coercive measures that are extraterritorial in scope.

Despite the adoption of that resolution with a record number of affirmative votes, the United States further tightened embargo measures through stricter and more thorough monitoring of their application and the introduction of new measures to intensify their enforcement against the will of the international community. Soon after the adoption of resolution 53/4 by the General Assembly, the United States Congress passed the Omnibus Appropriations Act for fiscal year 1999, which further reinforces the Helms-Burton Act. The economic blockade has severely affected the socio-economic situation in Cuba. The economic damage until 1998 has been estimated at $67 billion, and the estimated effect of the embargo on the Cuban economy in recent years has exceeded 15 per cent of the country's annual domestic product.

The imposition of an embargo on crucial items such as medicines and food has adversely affected the health and nutritional situation in Cuba. It is most deplorable to learn that the United States has even deprived Cuba of the opportunity to purchase medicines, equipment or medical supplies from other countries through the application of the Torricelli and Helms-Burton Acts and other embargo regulations. My delegation is strongly opposed to such unjust measures and calls for ending the embargo. As we enter the new millennium, the necessity of ending the United States economic, commercial and financial blockade against Cuba becomes more imperative than ever.

It is encouraging to learn from today's news that after almost 40 years, commercial flights between New York and Havana will resume next month. We sincerely hope that such a development will pave the way for enhancing contacts between the two peoples.

Myanmar is of the view that the promulgation and application by Member States of laws and regulations, the extraterritorial aspects of which affect the sovereignty of other States, the legitimate interest of entities or persons under their jurisdiction and freedom of trade and of navigation, violate the universally adopted principles of international law. In the interest of upholding the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, the delegation of Myanmar, consistent with its stand in previous years, will vote in favour of draft resolution A/54/L.11.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic) (*spoke in French*): My delegation very much regrets that the General Assembly, for the eighth consecutive year, must once again take up the agenda item on the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba.

This embargo, which has gone on for more than 30 years, has no *raison d'être* and serves the interests of neither of the two parties involved. What is worse, it violates the sovereignty of other States and the freedom of trade and of navigation. In our view, the embargo should end, and everything must be done to support and assist this developing country, the Republic of Cuba, so that it can be reintegrated into the liberalized and globalized world economy.

Like all peace-loving peoples in the world, the Cuban people seeks only to live in peace and dignity. Certainly this brave people would also very much like to

promote its economic relations with all the peoples of the world, including the American people. The international community must do its utmost to encourage the two parties, the Republic of Cuba and the United States, to seriously continue their negotiations and come to an agreement in order to resolve their differences as soon as possible.

The blockade against Cuba, which is anachronistic and even has extraterritorial effects, is absurd. Unfortunately, the blockade still goes on and is even being tightened. We believe it is unfair to punish a people — an entire people — that has not committed any crime. Is it not high time to put an end to this restrictive commercial practice that runs counter to the present global trend favouring dialogue and international economic cooperation? It is in this spirit that my delegation will vote in favour of draft resolution A/54/L.11.

Mr. Dorda (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am not here merely to reaffirm that we will vote in favour of the draft resolution now before the Assembly. This is obvious to delegations, and there can be no doubt about it. I am addressing the Assembly in order to congratulate the Cuban people — the people of a small country that for 40 years has stayed the course, maintaining its opposition to the United States and thus furnishing proof that it can live in full freedom on its national soil, despite the presence of a pernicious neighbouring Power, that does not respect the international community or international law or conven ions. It does not even respect itself.

With regard to the Cuban people, they deserve whatever support and respect we can give them because they have chosen to live in freedom and dignity, even if this dignity demands privations because of the blockade and the attacks on their sovereignty. The Cubans have not accepted a fistful of dollars in exchange for their dignity.

The Cuban people serves as a model for all peoples who thought that after the disappearance of the former international balance of power, the United States would become the new god. I urge all those whose faith has been destabilized and threatened to renew their faith in God, because God alone and no one else can help them in their resolve. Not the United States, nor any other world Power, can take the place of the Almighty.

I call upon all peoples whose leaderships have begun to bow down before the United States, not to accept the violation of their dignity, their territorial integrity and their sovereignty. I urge them to model themselves on the Cuban people, who have maintained their existence and freedom, opposed their powerful neighbour and refused to bend to its will.

A life of dignity, even for one day, will go down in history, and posterity will truly remember it. The United States is not a god and has no real power. Power belongs to God alone.

The official United States position vis-à-vis Cuba is part of an enormous campaign that has been cleverly orchestrated and manipulated. If the United States really wanted democracy in Cuba, it would not have supported Batista. Nor would the United States have supported the Iranian Shah, the dictator par excellence, nor would it have given Mobutu its absolute support. The United States continues to support non-democratic regimes, dictatorial regimes. The United States is concerned only about its own interests, not democracy.

This country that talks of international principles, of international norms, must, first and foremost, respect those norms itself. The United States shows absolutely no respect for human rights, nor for the Charter of the United Nations. How can it dare to deprive the Cuban people of the right to purchase medicines, foodstuffs and other essential goods from American markets? By what right can the United States do this? Or is humanity monopolized by the interests of United States citizens alone?

We protest the absurd unilateral adoption by one State of laws that seek to govern all of humanity. Cuba and all the free countries of the world that cherish their dignity and freedom have the right to protest these unilateral actions and must reject them. The United States wants to dictate its will to the world; the rest of us are, apparently, outlawed by the legislation of the United States, because we believe in God and have profound faith in ourselves. We will not bend to America's will.

I say to those States that thought that the end of the world would come with the disappearance of the old balance of power, "Follow Cuba's example." Cuba is a model for us. The Cuban people have preserved their dignity and freedom, because to live in dignity for one day is to be valued above all else.

Libya will support the Cuban people in their suffering, as we have always done with oppressed peoples, so as to prevent one State from controlling our world. In our country, as in Cuba, we want to preserve

our freedom, independence and resources, and so we proudly say to that one State, "No".

Ms. Ramírez (Argentina): (*spoke in Spanish*): The General Assembly is meeting once again to consider the necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo against the Republic of Cuba. In this context, the Argentine Republic wishes to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report, in which we are offered a complete overview of the perceptions of the international community.

My country believes that representative democracy, in the framework of plurality and freedom of the press, is the best political system for guaranteeing respect for human rights and individual freedoms. In the area of development, we maintain that economic freedoms and private initiative are the engine of the true growth of nations.

Within this concept of the world and society, which is inseparably linked to the idea of freedom, Argentina maintains that unrestricted respect for the letter and the spirit of the United Nations Charter is the essential foundation that sustains the functioning of the international community. In that sense, the application of unilateral economic and trade measures against one State and their extraterritorial implementation affect the freedom of the States Members of the Organization in a way that does not seem compatible with the Charter.

The Argentine Republic feels that any dispute that may emerge in the bilateral relations between two countries must be channelled through the procedures established in the Charter. We are also convinced that the lifting of the embargo imposed on the Republic of Cuba is the best way to promote freedom of trade, communications, flexibility and dialogue, the irreplaceable means of promoting change towards a representative democracy in Cuba.

The Argentine Republic has promulgated an act establishing that foreign legislation which is aimed, directly or indirectly, at restricting or impending the free flow of trade and the movement of capital, goods or persons to the detriment of a given country or group of countries shall neither be applicable nor have legal effects of any kind within Argentine territory. Furthermore, foreign legislation which seeks to have extraterritorial legal effects through the imposition of an economic embargo or limits on investment in a given country in order to promote a change in the form of government of a country or affect its right to self-determination shall also be utterly inapplicable and devoid of legal effect.

Argentina will therefore vote in favour of the draft resolution before us.

Mr. Pham Binh Minh (Viet Nam): The Vietnamese delegation attaches great importance to the question of the necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States against Cuba, under consideration by the General Assembly.

During the past seven consecutive sessions, the General Assembly has had this item on its agenda and adopted, with overwhelming support from member countries, the resolutions urging an immediate end to policies that resort to the application of extraterritorial laws and coercive measures against a sovereign nation. These policies violate the most fundamental principles and purposes enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, namely, the principles of national sovereignty, non-interference in the internal affairs of States and freedom of international trade and navigation.

Once again, my delegation wishes to join the international community in calling upon the United States of America to put an end to the embargo and blockade it has imposed on the Republic of Cuba for so many years. The policies of embargo and blockade have caused huge material losses and economic damage to the Cuban people. Viet Nam firmly holds that there is no justification for the continuation by one day further of these hostile policies. In fact, these policies should never have been applied in any case.

My delegation also wishes to underline that the differences between the United States and the Republic of Cuba should be settled through the means of dialogue and negotiation on the basis of mutual respect and respect for the independence and sovereignty of States. In line with this, Viet Nam welcomes every effort of the parties concerned to this effect.

In conclusion, Viet Nam reaffirms its unwavering support, cooperation and solidarity with the Cuban people and Government. Together with all the peace-, freedom- and justice-loving nations of the world, the Vietnamese people will continue to do its utmost to assist the Cuban people to overcome the impact of the embargo and blockade imposed upon them. Viet Nam will therefore again vote in favour of the draft resolution under consideration.

Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): For the eighth consecutive year, the General

Assembly is considering the item on the necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba.

The United Nations Charter enshrines the right of States to exercise sovereignty over their territory, as well as the principle of non-interference in their internal affairs. All United Nations Members, in particular the major Powers, are expected to respect the provisions of the Charter, which serves as the constitution of the Organization and its supreme law.

The blockade that has been imposed against Cuba for more than four decades has caused that country grave economic, social and political harm. This situation has been a source of constant concern to the international community in recent decades and it is high time to resolve this thorny problem.

The Syrian delegation pays tribute to Cuba, which has repeatedly declared its desire to resolve the problem of the embargo through dialogue. We therefore support Cuba's sincere appeal to the United States to establish constructive dialogue to resolve all the differences between them on the basis of equality, mutual respect, non-interference in internal affairs and good-neighbourly relations.

A cursory review of the results of the voting on the resolution submitted under this item for the past seven years clearly reveals that the number of countries supporting it has constantly increased, while abstentions and votes against it have significantly decreased. This is a striking illustration of the international community's sympathy for Cuba and its support for the need to lift the embargo and to respect the political, economic and social systems chosen by each Government of its own accord, based on its appropriate national interests. We wish to reaffirm that any measures taken by a State that could, because of territorial considerations, harm or violate the sovereignty of another State, run counter to the principle of respect for the sovereignty of Member States. In this context, we also wish to recall the content of the Declaration adopted at summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Durban, where the non-aligned countries urged the United States to lift the embargo, which has dragged on for too long and which runs counter to the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

The international community has repeatedly expressed its rejection of the Helms-Burton Act adopted by the United States, which transcends the concept of national jurisdiction and violates the sovereignty of other States that conduct business with Cuba. This Act and subsequent legislative amendments, particularly the 1999 American Omnibus Appropriations Act, which contains 12 amendments on Cuba, defy the fundamental principle of respect for the sovereignty of States. All these laws violate international trade agreements and are an affront to the will of peoples. For all these reasons, my delegation will vote in favour of the draft resolution contained in document A/54/L.11, submitted today to the General Assembly.

Mr. Ouane (Mali)(*spoke in French*): Starting eight years ago, the General Assembly has adopted by an ever-growing majority resolutions on the necessity of lifting the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed against Cuba by the United States of America.

Similarly, the twelfth summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, held at Durban in September 1998, reiterated the Movement's position, that the international community must oppose all acts of interference, external intervention and coercive economic measures and other measures, including extraterritorial laws and regulations that affect the sovereignty of States, the legitimate interests of entities and persons under their jurisdiction and the freedom of trade and of navigation.

In keeping with these positions and on the basis of the relevant provisions of the United Nations Charter and universally recognized principles of international law, Mali will this year again associate itself with the Member States calling for the lifting the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed on Cuba by the United States of America.

The Government of the Republic of Mali reaffirms the importance it attaches to respect for the principles of the sovereign equality of States, non-interference in internal affairs and freedom of trade and of international navigation, as recalled in draft resolution A/54/L.11, introduced by Cuba.

This is why we continue to oppose the extraterritorial application of national laws, which, in addition to constituting a violation of the relevant provisions of the United Nations Charter and international law, contravenes the principles and objectives of the World Trade Organization.

In the opinion of the Mali delegation, the two parties, Cuba and the United States, must take steps to resolve their disputes through dialogue and negotiation.

The Government of the Republic of Mali is seriously concerned about the repercussions of the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed on Cuba. As indicated by the report contained in document A/54/259, the embargo has seriously hampered the socio-economic development of Cuba and has worsened the plight of millions of Cubans, particularly the most vulnerable groups, such as children, women and the elderly.

In conclusion, I would like to say that, in keeping with its position of principle, Mali will vote in favour of the draft resolution contained in document A/54/L.11.

Mr. Kasanda (Zambia): I shall begin by thanking the Secretary-General for his report contained in document A/54/259, entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba". My delegation is equally grateful to the Cuban delegation for introducing draft resolution A/54/L.11 on this matter.

Over the years, when the General Assembly has considered this subject, Zambia has voted against the embargo imposed on Cuba. We shall again this year vote in favour of the draft resolution before us. Our vote is based on our adherence to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

In this respect, we firmly believe that the economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba and the Helms-Burton legislation are a breach of international law and a violation of the principles of the United Nations Charter. The extraterritorial nature of the Helms-Burton Act is an infringement of the territorial integrity of States and an impediment to international navigation and free trade, as embodied in the World Trade Organization Final Act.

The Government of Zambia is greatly concerned with the adverse effects of the economic blockade, which has aggravated the plight of the Cuban people, especially vulnerable groups, such as children, women and the elderly. It is not surprising, therefore, that the General Assembly has repeatedly adopted numerous resolutions demanding the lifting of the economic embargo against Cuba. Zambia disagrees with the extraterritorial implementation of national laws, such as the Helms-Burton Act, because such laws fly in the face of the principle of sovereign equality of States and non-interference in the internal affairs of States. Years after the end of the cold war, we very much regret attempts to condition and erode the principles of friendly and cooperative relationships between States.

Zambia's foreign policy is based, *inter alia*, on the principle of the sovereign equality of States, non-interference and the peaceful coexistence of nations. In this respect, I would like to state that Zambia has not promulgated or applied domestic laws vis-à-vis any State that would have extraterritorial jurisdiction. Zambia strives to fulfil in good faith the obligations it assumes in international agreements and conventions.

The Government of Zambia is committed to promoting freedom of navigation and of trade. As both a landlocked and transit country, Zambia has consistently reaffirmed the right of access of both landlocked and transit States to and from the sea by all means of transportation, in accordance with international law, and it is also committed to developing rule-based trade with all countries of the world.

It is against this background of principles and respect for the rights and independence of other States that my delegation once again calls for the complete lifting of the embargo against Cuba. We are pleased to note that our relations with Cuba are based on mutual respect and the principle of non-interference in each other's internal affairs. We believe that these values are part of the foundation on which healthy relations between States should be based.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): The item entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba" has been on the agenda of the General Assembly for the last seven consecutive years.

The adoption of resolution 53/4 of 14 October 1998 by an overwhelming majority of the General Assembly, as in the resolutions of previous years, was a clear rejection by this Assembly and the international community of the unilateral embargo against Cuba by the United States of America. The draft resolution before us today, which my delegation wholeheartedly supports, will undoubtedly secure the same, if not an increased, level of support. The message is clear: the international community does not support the unilateral efforts by the United States to effect extraterritorial application of what is essentially a domestic law upon Cuba, a sovereign State and a Member of this Organization.

The rejection of this hostile policy directed at Cuba was also expressed by the leaders of the non-aligned countries during their twelfth summit meeting, held in Durban in September 1998; Malaysia strongly supported the final document of that summit, wherein the heads of State or Government of the non-aligned countries reiterated their call upon the Government of the United States of America to put an end to the economic, commercial and financial actions against Cuba. This position was further reiterated in the final communiqué of the meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in New York on 23 September 1999.

Malaysia joins other countries in expressing its serious concern at the continued economic, commercial and financial embargo on Cuba by the United States, which has gravely impeded Cuba's socio-economic development and aggravated the plight of the Cuban people. We view this policy as being not only coercive but also utterly discriminatory in nature and a clear breach of the norms of international law; it runs counter to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter. That it is directed against a poor and small developing country that poses no threat to its mighty neighbour is particularly dismaying, especially when the United States considers itself a champion and promoter of global free trade, in which capital and goods should be able to move freely across national borders without unnecessary impediment.

Needless to say, the extraterritorial reach of the Helms-Burton Law has caused enormous economic damage and untold suffering to the people of Cuba. Mr. Alarcón, the President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Cuba, eloquently highlighted in his statement this morning the enormity of the impact of this legislation on his people. At the same time, this United States law also damages the interests of third States by inhibiting commercial transactions with Cuba. As a staunch advocate of free trade and relations between nations, on the basis of respect for the norms and principles of international law, and consistent with its own cherished values and traditions, the United States clearly cannot persist in its current policy against Cuba, with its serious humanitarian impact on the lives of the valiant Cuban people.

My delegation had hoped in past years that the overwhelming rejection by the international community of this discriminatory policy vis-à-vis Cuba would influence the United States to review its overall approach towards its neighbour and to evolve its policy of isolating Cuba to one of dialogue and accommodation, as befits relations between two geographically close neighbours. This remains our hope.

Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia): I would like to begin by thanking the Secretary-General for his report contained in document A/54/259. I am equally grateful to the Cuban delegation for introducing draft resolution A/54/L.11, entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba".

In this regard, it is pertinent to mention that Indonesia has always been a country committed to justice, equality and peace. The Constitution of Indonesia clearly stipulates the importance of these principles. Their implementation is a fundamental obligation contained in the provisions of the United Nations Charter and generally recognized principles of international law. Therefore, Indonesia has consistently renounced the use of coercive measures as a means of exerting pressure in relations among the Member States of the Organization.

In this connection, it is regrettable to note that for the past 37 years a unilateral economic embargo has been imposed on Cuba, reflecting the continuation of untenable past policies. Furthermore, we are appalled by the application of a national act that has extraterritorial ramifications.

Experience has shown that sanctions rarely serve their purposes; they only inflict immense material loss and economic damage on the civilian population of the targeted State. For this compelling reason, in the last seven years, the General Assembly has adopted resolutions on the need to end the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States on Cuba. It is important to highlight that the number of States in support of this resolution has increased year after year. Last year 157 States, or 85 per cent of the membership of the United Nations, supported resolution 53/4.

At a time when many countries have focused attention on the necessity of humanitarian intervention in conflicts, it is difficult, at least to my delegation, to understand the reasoning behind the imposition of such sanctions considering the profound socio-economic consequences. It is equally difficult to comprehend the rationalization advanced to justify subordinating the right of people to live in economic sufficiency.

With the coming of a new millennium it is encouraging to note that many changes in political perspectives and policies have actually crystallized, signalling the emergence of a positive new era. In that context, we are of the view that the time is ripe to adopt a realistic policy towards Cuba involving a transition from isolation to positive engagement.

My delegation firmly believes that the settlement of disputes among United Nations Member States should be carried out through dialogue and negotiations guided by the Charter and based on the principles of sovereignty, sovereign equality of States and good neighbourliness.

In this light, it is pertinent to note that the meeting of Ministers for Foreign Affairs and heads of delegations of the Non-Aligned Movement during the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, held in New York on 23 September 1999, once again called on the parties concerned to strictly comply with the relevant United Nations resolutions and emphasized the need to terminate the economic, commercial and financial sanctions against Cuba.

For these reasons, my delegation will vote in favour of the draft resolution before the Assembly.

Mr. Andjaba (Namibia): I wish once again to reiterate my Government's position on the continued extraterritorial extension of the commercial and financial embargo imposed on the Government and the people of the Republic of Cuba by the United States of America.

Namibia has repeatedly advocated an end to this economic, commercial and financial embargo, for we firmly believe that the Helms-Burton Act and the D'Amato legislation are a breach of international law and a violation of the principles of the United Nations Charter.

Moreover, these punitive measures are contrary to the spirit of the much-talked-about globalization, peaceful coexistence and open trade.

The economic embargo continues to have a negative impact upon the economic development of Cuba and has made it extremely difficult for the country to purchase the food, medicine, fuel and raw materials needed to sustain the lives of the Cuban people. As a result, enormous suffering has been inflicted upon the Cuban people, especially women and children.

The rejection of this hostile policy directed at Cuba was also expressed by the leaders of the non-aligned countries during their twelfth summit meeting, held in Durban, South Africa, in September 1998, as contained in the final document, which Namibia strongly supported. In that document, the heads of State or Government of the non-aligned countries reiterated their collective call upon the Government of the United States of America to put an end to the economic, commercial and financial actions against Cuba. This position was further reiterated in the final communiqué of the meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement held in New York on 23 September 1999.

In this regard, Namibia, which maintains and enjoys excellent relations with both the United States of America and Cuba, urges the immediate lifting of this embargo for the benefit of the people of the two countries.

For these sound and practical reasons, Namibia will vote in favour of the draft resolution contained in document A/54/L.11, which was introduced earlier by Mr. Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada, President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Cuba.

Miss Durrant (Jamaica): The agenda item entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba" is again before the General Assembly for consideration.

My delegation joins others in calling for an end to the unilateral economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba. We do so out of our firm belief in the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the need to adhere to them.

In keeping with its policy, Jamaica maintains no legislation or measures that would affect the sovereignty of any State or the legitimate interests of its nationals or would hinder the freedom of trade and navigation. Jamaica is strongly opposed to the extraterritorial application of national legislation.

As the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Jamaica, stated in his address to the General Assembly at this session,

> "The continuation of the embargo against Cuba is a source of tension and carries the risk of conflict,

which is particularly troubling for neighbouring States." (*A/54/PV.17, p.4*)

Jamaica would like to see progress in the establishment of a regime of peace and cooperation in the Caribbean Sea, and to this end, we urge both parties to engage in a constructive process of dialogue to bring an end to policies of confrontation and exclusion, with a view to normalizing relations.

Accordingly, my delegation supports the content of the draft resolution contained in document A/54/L.11 and will vote in favour of its adoption.

Mr. Bandora (United Republic of Tanzania): As in many years in the past, the Assembly is again considering the issue of the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the Government of the United States against Cuba without any indication that this unjustified measure will be lifted any time soon.

My delegation regrets that despite numerous appeals and the resolutions of the General Assembly, the United States has not yet found it possible to bring an end to these unilateral measures that continue to strangulate the economy of a Member State and hinder international trade and cooperation. We regret in particular that the embargo continues to cause undue suffering to the Cuban people, not only through its destructive economic effects but also by virtue of the limitation it has often imposed on international response to humanitarian need in that country.

We have noted the limited measures allowed by the United States Government to expand the scope of people-to-people contacts between Cuba and the United States. We remain concerned, however, that there is no indication of a path designed to expand on these measures and bring the parties to dialogue.

We further continue to be concerned that the so-called Helms-Burton Act, with its overly broad and unacceptable implications for the sovereignty of other States, remains an instrument of reference in the United States. The Assembly, as well as the Non-Aligned Movement, has taken a clear position against the Helms-Burton Act as legislation without legitimacy and lacking legality under international law. Tanzania continues to support that position, as we do the imperative for a dialogue between the two countries. We see enormous possibilities for cooperation between the two States, in spite of their differences. We do not see those differences as justifying the embargo, nor the far-reaching legislative measures undertaken by the United States against Cuba.

We also continue to be profoundly moved by the plea made on behalf of the Cuban people by Pope John Paul II following his visit to that country last year. The Pope's plea is one that over the years the Assembly, and our countries individually, has sought to underscore and reinforce at every turn. We urge our friends in the United States to heed that plea. We urge them to move away from the limiting and destructive legacies of history and to re-engage Cuba in an expanded dialogue that will lead to the ending of the embargo and the normalization of relations between the two countries.

Mr. Bivero (Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Multilateralism, represented by this Organization, is universally recognized as one of the best ways to promote solutions to common problems that, because of their nature and scope, require collective responses. It is for this reason that Venezuela shares the belief that there is a need for the General Assembly to continue considering the item on the necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba.

In the context of the process of growing interdependence, even as calls are being made for free access to financial markets, goods, services, it is paradoxical to witness situations in which obstacles to such interaction are erected unilaterally and without regard for their effects upon the human development of a people — even more so when we see that those obstacles are erected by applying internal norms with extraterritorial scope or effects that run counter to international public law.

Venezuela rejects the application of unilateral coercive measures such as the Helms-Burton Law because we believe that such actions violate the sovereignty of States, affect the legitimate interests of entities and citizens under the jurisdiction of third parties and undermine the rules of free trade stipulated by the World Trade Organization. That is why we wish to take this opportunity to reiterate the content of the Asunción Declaration, which was adopted at the Eleventh Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Rio Group, as well as other, similar statements issued by our region's Permanent Mechanism for Consultation and Concerted Political Action.

We would also like to point out that at the seventh Ibero-American Summit, held on Margarita Island, Venezuela, in November 1997, the Heads of State and Government of that group of countries also expressed their rejection of the application of that law because they believed that it violated the principles governing international coexistence and ran counter to the spirit of cooperation and friendship that should characterize relations among all the members of the international community.

At a time when the international community is moving towards the consolidation of democracy and fundamental freedoms, it is necessary to join efforts so that all States resolve their disputes in accordance with the measures recognized by international law, and not by political and economic coercion or any other type of pressure that undermines the sovereignty of States. Venezuela believes that the embargo against Cuba is contrary to international law, the self-determination of peoples and human development. We hope that it will be possible to put an end to it soon.

In the light of these considerations, our delegation will vote in favour of the draft resolution contained in document A/54/L.11, entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba".

Mr. Tchoulkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Russia supports the draft resolution before the General Assembly, entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba", and shares the view of the overwhelming majority of Member States of the United Nations in support of lifting the embargo imposed by the United States against Cuba, a unilateral measure that violates the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and the basic norms of international law and justice.

We are convinced that the continuing commercial and economic blockade against Cuba by the United Sates is a relic of the cold war and that it should be halted. We continue to oppose steps by the United States to tighten the embargo and, in particular, to expand the extraterritorial, and therefore illegal, effect of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act of 12 March 1996. We believe that, on the whole, this law is discriminatory and that it runs counter to the norms of international law and the principles of free trade.

Russia is seriously concerned about attempts by the United States to exert pressure on third countries and certain international organizations so that they will curtail their cooperation with Cuba. Those attempts are clearly at variance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Our approach to this problem is that lifting the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States against Cuba, in particular, and the normalization of United States-Cuban relations, in general, would help improve the situation in the region and would be conducive to Cuba's greater integration into world economic relations, thus helping it advance along the path of reform.

Russia, for its part, abides strictly by the principles set out in resolution 53/4, entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba". These principles are the sovereign equality of States, non-interference in their internal affairs, and freedom of trade and international navigation. We reaffirm our intention to continue to develop normal commercial and economic relations with Cuba, based on common interest and mutual benefit and implemented in strict accordance with our obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and generally recognized principles and norms of international law, without any discrimination or jeopardy to the legal rights and interests of the parties.

Of course, the Russian delegation will vote in favour of the draft resolution before us.

Mr. Eltom (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): For the eighth successive year, the General Assembly is debating an extremely important question: that of the continued economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed coercively, unilaterally and unjustly by the United States against Cuba.

At all previous sessions, the Assembly renewed its unequivocal rejection of the promulgation and application of similar measures. We are fully convinced that they represent a clear and blatant violation of the principles of international law, those regulating the free flow and other norms of international trade. They also violate the principle of the sovereignty of States and of the sovereign equality between large and small nations.

The report (A/54/259) of the Secretary-General shows, as have his previous reports on the subject, the destructive results of the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of

America against Cuba as a coercive and unilateral measure. The report also shows the adverse impact of the embargo on the vital sectors of the Cuban economy, particularly the agricultural and health-care sectors.

Despite the declaration by the State enforcing this arbitrary measure that amendments to its policy will allow for the export of food and medicine to alleviate the humanitarian hardships faced by the Cuban people, the situation, as described by the Cuban Government, is very different. The United States still enforces the provisions of the embargo against Cuba strictly and comprehensively. It continues to issue official warnings and threats with the intent of punishing companies that invest in Cuba. All initiatives to amend these provisions have been thwarted.

The unilateral and coercive economic embargo imposed by the United States, as an important element of its foreign policy designed to promote its self-interest, has affected other developing countries, including the Sudan. This has been the case since November 1997. The United States, not satisfied with applying unilateral economic measures against the Sudan, has also carried out attacks against its development projects, economic infrastructure and its scarce resources and limited capabilities. It launched its military act of aggression against the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical plant in August of last year. The United States still seeks, through the use of various coercive measures, to obstruct the process of peaceful settlement of the conflict in my country, in a way that all representatives are familiar with.

This unilateral attempt to impose coercive measures constitutes a clear and blatant violation of the norms of international law and of the Charter of the United Nations. It jeopardizes the right of nations to choose and adopt their own political systems and development strategies. The resolutions of the General Assembly have already highlighted the adverse effects of these measures, which include obstructing the free flow of trade and the transfer of technology to developing countries. This prevents such States from taking part in the process of integration and constructive interaction among States, which aims at building a better future for humankind. This should occur under sound international circumstances, with full respect for the sovereignty of all States, large and small.

These measures deprive States of their right to development — one of the most important of human rights. Thus, the imposition of economic sanctions is a blatant violation of human rights.

In conclusion, the delegation of the Sudan expresses once again its firm rejection of the promulgation and application of extra-territorial laws. My delegation therefore urges the lifting of the unjust embargoes in effect against Cuba, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, the Sudan and all other States which are the targets of such coercive unilateral measures.

My delegation reiterates its support for the draft resolution presented by Cuba and will vote in its favour.

Mr. Hasan (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): For 40 years now, the United States has imposed its inhumane embargo against Cuba, in violation of the principles of international law and international humanitarian law. This has taken the lives of thousands of Cubans and caused great suffering for 11 million more, as has been shown by many impartial international reports.

The more voices are heard around the world calling for the end of this inhumane embargo, the more United States intransigence increases and the more the embargo tightens. Now it is affecting other peoples besides the Cubans. The Helms-Burton Act has had devastating effects on other States. It is a direct violation of the sovereignty of other States and of their right to free trade with Cuba. Furthermore, it represents a blatant violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law. It is also a violation of the rules governing the free flow of international trade.

The United States embargo against Cuba, which is being steadfastly resisted by the Cuban people, is not an isolated case in the context of America's relations with the international community. In 1998, the United States imposed unilateral sanctions against 75 countries, whose populations account for more than half the world population. The United States is the only country that insists on the continuation of comprehensive sanctions against Iraq. We know, however, that the resolutions and sanctions adopted against Iraq have caused enormous damage and taken the lives of more than one million Iraqi citizens, and destroyed its infrastructure and the social fabric of its people. We ask the United States to allow justice, reason and laws to prevail in its policies, to respond to the calls of the international community and to put an end to the embargo decreed against States, and to renew dialogue and a policy of cooperation in keeping with the rules of international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

We call upon all Member States to vote in favour of the draft resolution contained in document A/54/L.11, because it sends once again a clear message to the United States to put an end to this policy of exclusion and flagrant strategy of blockade.

The President: Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I should like to propose, if there is no objection, that the list of speakers in the debate on this item be closed immediately.

It was so decided.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): I am speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

South Africa would like to take this opportunity once again to underline the need to end the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed unilaterally by the United States of America on the Republic of Cuba. In this respect, we wish to recall the final document adopted at the Non-Aligned Movement summit held in Durban, South Africa, which expressed "deep concern over the widening of, the extraterritorial nature of the embargo against Cuba and over continuous new legislative measures geared to intensifying it" (A/53/667, annex I, para. 255). Furthermore, during this session of the General Assembly, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and heads of delegation of the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement called for an end to this unilateral embargo, which is contrary to the United Nations Charter, international law and good neighbourliness. It has caused huge material losses and economic damage to the people of Cuba.

All signatories to the United Nations Charter have a duty and responsibility to strictly uphold its vision, principles and obligations. These principles are equally binding on all Member States. They reaffirm the equality of sovereign States and the requirement of non-intervention and non-interference in their domestic affairs. These principles also include freedom of international trade and navigation, both of which are integral parts of many international legal instruments.

For decades, Cuba has suffered from the unilateral imposition of this unjust economic embargo, which constitutes a violation of the basic norms governing international relations. Furthermore, the embargo continues to cause untold suffering for its civilian population.

South Africa, as well the majority of other Member States, continues to oppose the Helms-Burton Act because of the threat it poses to the sovereignty of other States and its unilateral and extraterritorial nature, as well as the fact that it inhibits the free flow of international trade. In line with the United Nations Charter and consistent with resolution 53/4, among others, the Government of South Africa therefore encourages the settlement of this dispute through peaceful negotiation between the parties. In this respect, constructive interaction will foster mutual confidence and trust as well as engender harmonious coexistence between the two nations.

South Africa will once again support the draft resolution under consideration by the General Assembly under this agenda item, in document A/54/L.11. We will do so because, as President Mbeki stressed in his address to the General Assembly at the opening of the general debate at this session, the time has come for measures to be taken to ensure that the principles of the Charter inform our actions and what happens in the world we all share.

Mr. Nejad Hosseinian (Islamic Republic of Iran): In almost all United Nations resolutions and decisions on financial and commercial issues and related final declarations and conclusions of high-level meetings in this system, the critical need for an equitable, secure, non-discriminatory and predictable multilateral trading system has been emphasized. The necessity of achieving an international economic and financial environment and an investment climate that are positive and favourable to developing countries, thereby facilitating an increase in their share of international trade and finance — a development necessary for world economic growth, including the creation of productive employment — has also been endorsed by consensus year after year. These instruments have also requested all countries to abolish all measures which could impede free international trade and financial transactions. In a number of high-level meetings within the United Nations, Member States reaffirmed and renewed their commitments to uphold and strengthen the multilateral trading system for the economic and social advancement of all countries and peoples.

The promotion of international cooperation and friendly relations among States, and the strengthening of commitments to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law, particularly sovereign equality, non-interference in the internal affairs of other States and the peaceful settlement of disputes, have also been major objectives of the United Nations system.

Despite the existence of a new international environment which is conducive to strengthening constructive dialogue and genuine partnership to promote further economic cooperation for development, recourse to unilateral coercive economic measures has been on the rise. Such policies and measures constitute major impediments to financial freedom and the access of all countries to financial resources, and thereby hamper the economic development and expansion of financial relations at all levels.

All countries should refrain from recourse to such measures and actions, which are absolutely contrary to the provisions of the Charter as well as the principles of international law embodied in various international instruments and documents, in particular the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Universal Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition, the Declaration on the Inadmissibility of Intervention in the Domestic Affairs of States and the Protection of Their Independence and Sovereignty and the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States. Such measures and actions adversely affect the social and economic development, as well as the humanitarian activities, of a target country, and consequently hinder the full realization of human rights by the people subjected to these measures; thus, they should be abolished if they are in place.

It is an undeniable right of every State to choose its political, economic, social and cultural system without interference in any form by another State. Since the ultimate objective of these measures is to undermine international peace and security and create political and economic instability in other countries, the Islamic Republic of Iran, like other members of the international community, advocates the removal and elimination of all economic and trade embargoes imposed upon Cuba, and believes that differences between States should be settled in a peaceful manner. In this connection the Twelfth Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in South Africa, called upon all Governments to abolish the economic, commercial and financial measures and actions against Cuba.

Cognizant of the economic, social and financial difficulties the Cuban nation is facing as a result of the embargo, my delegation would like to extend its support once again to any step that the General Assembly may wish to take to resolve the issue under consideration through peaceful means and on the basis of the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. Therefore, my delegation will vote in favour of the draft resolution under this agenda item.

The international community should clearly reject the promulgation and application of unilateral actions, laws and regulations whose extraterritorial impact adversely affects the freedom of trade and finance, the sovereignty or the economic, commercial and financial interests of other States, or the legitimate interests of entities or persons under their jurisdiction.

The President: We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/54/L.11.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in explanation of vote before the voting.

May I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Ms. Korpi (Finland): I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the European Union with reference to draft resolution A/54/L.11, entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba". The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, as well as the European Free Trade Association country member of the European Economic Area, Iceland, align themselves with this explanation of vote.

Let me refer to the European Union Common Position of 2 December 1996, and reiterate on this occasion that the main objective of the European Union in its relations with Cuba is to encourage a process of gradual and peaceful transition to pluralistic democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as sustainable recovery and improvement in the living standards of the Cuban people. The European Union recognizes that some positive developments took place in 1998, but it continues to be concerned about the political and economic situation in Cuba, and expresses its hope for durable and substantive improvements.

More recently, the Cuban social, political and economic situation has seen very little change, and the

human rights situation has seen no change at all. The positive development of human rights after the visit of the Pope has not continued. For example, four leading Cuban dissidents were condemned in a closed juridical procedure to imprisonment. The international community reacted strongly against that act as a violation of freedom of expression. The European Union is concerned about some aspects of the law adopted on 16 February 1999 by the National Assembly penalizing the exercise of the right of citizens to express opinions and to disseminate information.

The European Union emphasizes the fundamental responsibility of the Cuban authorities regarding human rights such as freedom of thought, opinion, expression, assembly and association, and rights associated with the administration of justice, and in this connection urges them to liberate and fully reintegrate into society all prisoners of conscience. We appeal to the Cuban authorities to cooperate fully with international human rights bodies and mechanisms.

Cuba has been very active in various international and regional forums. The European Union welcomes its participation in the summit between States of the Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union that was held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1999.

The European Union acknowledges that steps towards better economic integration have been taken by the Cuban Government and stresses the need for a progressive and irreversible opening of the Cuban economy. The European Union reiterates its wish to be Cuba's partner in such a process. However, its full cooperation with Cuba will depend upon improvement in human rights and in political freedom.

As expressed in the European Union Common Position of 2 December 1996, it is not our policy to bring about change by coercive measures with the effect of increasing the economic hardship of the Cuban people.

The European Union believes that United States trade policy towards Cuba is primarily a matter for those two Governments. But the European Union has made clear its opposition to the extraterritorial extension of the United States embargo, such as that contained in the so-called Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 and the Helms-Burton Act of 1996.

Furthermore, we wish to reaffirm that the European Union's strong opposition, both in law and in principle, to the imposition of secondary boycotts and to legislation with extraterritorial and retroactive effects remains unchanged.

In November 1996 the Council of Ministers of the European Union adopted a regulation and a joint action to protect the interests of natural or legal persons resident in the European Union against the extraterritorial effects of the Helms-Burton legislation; these prohibit compliance with that legislation.

On 18 May 1998, at the European Union/United States summit in London, a package was agreed with regard to United States sanctions laws, including a commitment by the United States Administration to resist future extraterritorial legislation of this kind and an understanding with respect to disciplines for the strengthening of investment protection.

The European Union takes the view that this represents an important step forward towards resolving the outstanding questions with the United States on this matter. We emphasize, however, that the European Union's commitment to implementing the package must be matched by the United States side. We look forward to progress in this area.

For all these reasons, the States of the European Union will unanimously support the draft resolution before us today.

Mr. Burleigh (United States of America): The United States opposes this ill-advised draft resolution and encourages all other delegations to do likewise. The decision of the United States to maintain a trade embargo against the Government of Cuba is strictly a matter of bilateral trade policy and not a matter appropriate for consideration in or by the General Assembly. The contention, implicit in the draft resolution, that the United States forbids others from trading with Cuba is simply wrong. Sovereign States themselves decide with which other States they will trade. Because of the repressive policies and actions of the Castro Government itself, the United States chooses not to trade with the Cuban Government.

The United States imposed and maintains a bilateral economic trade embargo as one element of a policy of promoting democracy in Cuba. While maintaining the bilateral trade embargo, the Clinton Administration has moved to expand dramatically people-to-people contacts with the Cuban population, to increase remittances and to allow the sale of food and agricultural inputs to private

entities. The American people have been extremely generous in providing humanitarian assistance to Cuba. The goal of this policy is to foster a transition to a democratic form of government, to protect human rights, to permit a civil society to thrive and to provide for the economic prosperity that the Cuban Government's disastrous economic polices are denying the Cuban people.

The authorities of the Castro Government believe that the human rights of the Cuban people — or, rather, the lack thereof — are a concern for them alone. My Government disagrees. Our fundamental premise, based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is that human rights violations in any one State are of concern to the entire international community.

The focus of the international community, as manifested in the United Nations, should be on the continuing human rights crisis in Cuba rather than on bilateral aspects of the United States efforts to facilitate a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba. The draft resolution under consideration serves only to distract the attention of the international community and, worse, may encourage the Cuban authorities to persist in their tragically misguided policies.

Mr. Sychov (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The delegation of the Republic of Belarus will support the draft resolution entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba", document A/54/L.11.

The Republic of Belarus does not agree with the adoption of any unilateral extraterritorial measures of a coercive nature, which run counter to the norms of international law and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, which authorize the Security Council alone to act in regard to the imposition of sanctions. These measures run counter to the generally recognized principles of the sovereign equality of States and non-interference in their internal affairs.

We call upon States Members to take further steps to eliminate discriminatory trade practices and to halt the unilateral economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of vote before the voting.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/54/L.11.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Canada, Cape Verde, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Lesotho, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Samoa, San Marino, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Against:

Israel, United States of America

Abstaining:

Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Micronesia (Federated States of), Morocco, Nicaragua, Senegal, Uzbekistan

Draft resolution A/54/L.11 was adopted by 155 votes to 2, with 8 abstentions (resolution 54/21).

[Subsequently, the delegations of Cameroon, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Saudi Arabia informed the Secretariat that they had intended to vote in favour.]

The President: I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in explanation of vote on the resolution just adopted. May I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan): Japan shares the concern expressed by many delegations today regarding the problem of extraterritorial application of jurisdiction, such as that arising from the Helms-Burton Act of the United States. My Government has been closely following the implementation of the legislation and the circumstances surrounding it, and Japan's concerns remain unchanged. Thus, having considered the matter with utmost care, my delegation voted in favour of draft resolution A/54/L.11.

While Japan supports the draft resolution, we continue to believe that it might be worth considering whether the United Nations General Assembly is in fact the most suitable forum in which to address this very complex issue. As regards the economic embargo by the United States against Cuba, Japan believes that it is appropriate for both countries to seek a solution through bilateral dialogue and thus calls upon them to strengthen efforts towards that end.

I would like to take this opportunity to refer to the human rights situation in Cuba. My Government welcomes the visit of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, appointed by the Commission on Human Rights, who reported that many positive measures to improve the status of women have been taken by the Cuban Government. However, Japan remains concerned at the current human rights situation in Cuba and continues to hope that it will be improved.

Mr. Duval (Canada) (*spoke in French*): Canada shares with the United States the goal of encouraging democracy and liberalization in Cuba. However, we have been seeking this goal through different means. The Government of Canada continues to believe that a policy of constructive engagement has much more chance of having a beneficial effect on Cuba in the long run.

Canada is fundamentally opposed to the economic embargo, and we voted in favour of draft resolution A/54/L.11, calling for an end to sanctions. This 40-year embargo's effectiveness in achieving its objectives and encouraging the liberalization of Cuba has been negligible.

Canada welcomes with satisfaction the nascent signs of greater openness and greater flexibility on the part of the United States, in particular the announcement of additional person-to-person contacts between the two countries. We have long advocated such constructive engagement.

Canada reaffirms its position that the United States is not solely responsible for Cuba's difficulties. Last year, for example, there was no alleviation of the Cuban State's systematic repression of its citizens' rights of freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of movement.

Canada will continue to practise a policy of openness and frankness in its dialogue with Cuba, and it maintains its opposition to the economic embargo of Cuba, with its humanitarian consequences for the people of Cuba.

Mr. Suh (Republic of Korea): My delegation shares the concern already expressed by other delegations about the problem of the extraterritorial application of jurisdiction embodied in the so-called Helms-Burton Act. Such legislation has far-reaching implications for the norms and general principles of international law.

Having considered this matter for several years, the Government of the Republic of Korea decided to vote in favour of draft resolution A/54/L.11. This decision should not be interpreted to mean that we are no longer concerned about democracy and human rights in Cuba. We hope that progress will be made in this regard in the near future.

Mr. Pérez-Otermin (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Uruguayan delegation would like to explain its vote on the resolution just adopted by the General Assembly, entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba".

The Uruguayan delegation voted in favour of this resolution on the basis of one of the essential and traditional principles of its foreign policy — promoting free trade without any restrictions — and also on the basis of the fact that Uruguay's laws do not recognize the extraterritorial application of internal laws. We regard acts of this sort as a clear violation of national sovereignty, which is a basic principle of international law, and also as a violation of the Charter of this Organization.

Uruguay does not see this as the appropriate way to achieve democratic openness in Cuba. Uruguay will therefore continue to take any steps that, in its opinion, may facilitate this desired openness and promote the full enjoyment of the freedoms and rights of a democratic regime.

Mr. Moura (Brazil): As in previous years, the delegation of Brazil voted in favour of the resolution on this subject that has just been adopted. In our opinion, the settlement of disputes between States must be sought through peaceful means. Any forceful measures, such as sanctions or embargoes, are exceptions to this general rule. Such measures should be resorted to only when all other means have been exhausted, and in any case they must be firmly based on international law.

Brazil reiterates its position that discriminatory trade practices and the extraterritorial application of domestic law run counter to the need to promote dialogue and to ensure the prevalence of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Sanctions and embargoes that contradict international law increase tensions. If they affect the interests of third States, as they do in this case, the international community has even more reason for concern.

Besides being rejected by the General Assembly, the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America has been rejected in a number of other international forums, such as the Organization of American States, the Rio Group, the Ibero-American Summit and the Latin American Economic System. The embargo is also not in accordance with the legal obligations of the members of the World Trade Organization.

Brazil joins the near-unanimity of the international community in rejecting these unilateral measures.

Ms. Zhang Xiao'an (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation voted in favour of the resolution that has just been adopted.

Over the years the United Nations has adopted many resolutions urging all States to observe the Charter of the United Nations and the norms of international law and to avoid implementing laws and measures that endanger third States' legitimate rights and interests. However, regrettably, the United States Government has not responded to the international community's calls. It has refused to implement the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly.

The continuing sanctions and embargo imposed by the United States Government have posed great difficulties for the Cuban people in their endeavour to achieve economic and social development and reform, thus seriously constraining the Cuban Government's efforts to eradicate poverty and enhance its people's living standards. Cuban women and children have borne the brunt of the suffering, especially in terms of their health and welfare.

The United States embargo against Cuba violates the human rights of the peoples of other States, and its unilateral actions have also hindered Cuba's engagement in normal trade and economic contacts with many other countries, thereby seriously encroaching upon Cuba's legitimate rights and interests.

This kind of phenomenon should not be allowed to persist. History tells us that only on the basis of mutual respect for other States' choices and through dialogue and negotiation on an equal footing can differences between States be effectively resolved. We hope that the United States Government will take constructive actions that are in keeping with the times.

Mr. Brattskar (Norway): The Norwegian Government believes there is a clear distinction between unilateral measures and sanctions adopted by the international community through the United Nations. Only sanctions adopted by the international community through relevant and representative organizations have the necessary legitimacy, and no country should impose its legislation on third countries.

Therefore, Norway again this year voted in favour of the draft resolution entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba", contained in document A/54/L.11. This does not in any way mean that Norway condones violations of human rights in Cuba. We do not, however, consider isolation through unilateral measures, such as the embargo under

discussion, to be an appropriate response to the situation and developments in Cuba.

Norway believes that more can be achieved through a constructive dialogue from which no theme should be excluded. We are at present engaged in such a constructive and open dialogue with Cuban authorities, a dialogue that focuses on human rights.

Mr. Blumenthal (Australia): Australia voted in favour of resolution 54/21. While Australia shares concerns about the state of human rights and political freedoms in Cuba, we do not consider that isolating Cuba through economic sanctions is an effective means of achieving human rights and political reform. Australia has consistently expressed its opposition, as a matter of principle, to the promulgation and application by States Members of the United Nations of laws and measures whose extraterritorial effects affect the sovereignty of other States, the legitimate interests of entities or persons under their jurisdiction, as well as the freedom of trade and navigation. In Australia's view, such laws and measures are not justified by the principles of international law and comity. Australia is concerned about the unilateral extraterritorial aspects of the Helms-Burton Act, which codifies and broadens the embargo by targeting foreign investors in Cuba.

For these reasons, Australia has again voted in favour of the resolution submitted under this item.

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 22?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.

United Nations

A/54/PV.51

General Assembly

Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

51st plenary meeting
Wednesday, 10 November 1999, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab . . . . . (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 36

Bethlehem 2000

Draft resolution (A/54/L.20)

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Senegal, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.20.

Mr. Ka (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*spoke in French*): It gives me great pleasure once again to address the Assembly on an item that is dear to the hearts of millions of people throughout the world: the forthcoming commemoration of the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the celebration of the new millennium in the symbolic city of Bethlehem. I believe that this event is of special importance, not merely for the Palestinians and the peoples of the region, but also for all believers throughout the world. For 16 months, from Christmas 1999 to Easter 2001, the Palestinian city of Bethlehem will be the site of the commemoration, in a spirit of joy and of hope, of this historic anniversary, which will coincide with the advent of the third millennium.

Thousands of visitors from all regions of the world, from all walks of life and from all faiths, will make the pilgrimage to Bethlehem for a unique experience in a spirit of communion, openness and sharing. The message that will be delivered at Bethlehem will be one of universal peace, dialogue and reconciliation. This strong message will, I am sure, reflect an aspiration so profound and fundamental that it will stimulate the imagination and energy of all people of goodwill.

As the Assembly is aware, the Palestinian Authority, in anticipation of masses of pilgrims arriving in Bethlehem, in 1997 launched the Bethlehem 2000 project in order to welcome the millions of tourists and pilgrims who wish to commemorate in Bethlehem a unique event in this holy land. In order to promote the particularly rich past of the city and to give a boost to the tourist industry, the Palestinian Authority has organized a series of projects.

The Bethlehem 2000 project, an enormous undertaking, seeks primarily to restore the religious and historical sites of the city and to upgrade the city's infrastructures. The restoration of these historical sites and the upgrading of the infrastructures, many of which are damaged and have been abandoned for many years now, have been real challenges for the Palestinian leadership. Years of conflict have had a negative impact not only on the socio-economic situation of the inhabitants of Bethlehem, but also on the condition of the sites and of the city's buildings and public services.

In order to lend support to the Bethlehem 2000 project, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable

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Rights of the Palestinian People in May 1998 requested the inclusion of an item entitled "Bethlehem 2000" in the agenda of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. Following an extremely interesting debate, the General Assembly adopted, without a vote, resolution 53/27 of 18 November 1998, in which it expressed support for the project and called for the international community's increased assistance and engagement to this laudable initiative.

In response to the General Assembly's request, the Committee last year implemented a programme of activities to heighten awareness of the Bethlehem 2000 project and to mobilize support for it. One of the most important activities was the convening of the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome, on 18 and 19 February 1999, in cooperation with the Italian Government and the Holy See, which I wish solemnly to thank once again for their support in helping to organize that Conference.

Many personalities attended the Rome Conference, including Mr. Francesco Rutelli, the mayor of Rome; Mr. Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs and representative of the Secretary-General of our Organization; Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, President of the Central Committee for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 and head of the delegation of the Holy See; Mr. Jacques Baudin, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Senegal; Mr. Azeddine Laraki, Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference; Mr. Jacques Diouf, Director General of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization; and Mr. Lamberto Dini, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy.

The eminent personalities who spoke at the Conference included Mr. Luciano Violante, President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, and Mr. Domenico Fisichella, Senator and Vice-President of the Italian Senate and representative of Nicola Mancino, President of the Italian Senate. The Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat, also made an important statement.

In Rome, Mr. Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, then President of the Republic of Italy, received the Committee delegation and expressed the readiness of his country to continue to make every effort to revive the peace process. The delegation also had an audience with His Holiness Pope John Paul II, who welcomed the Committee's activities and sent his best wishes for the success of the events soon to be held in Bethlehem.

The Committee continued to increase its support for the project by organizing other activities, in particular an international meeting in Windhoek, Namibia, in April 1999, as well as meetings with representatives of the European Union, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States. I should like to take this opportunity to thank you, Mr. President, for your personal contribution to the success of the Windhoek meeting.

An exhibition entitled "Bethlehem 2000", which includes works of art and photographs of Bethlehem, was organized to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 29 November 1998, at United Nations Headquarters. The exhibition was also on view during the meetings in Rome and Windhoek. On the occasion of the next International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which will be commemorated at the end of this month, the Committee will present another exhibition of Palestinian art, also on the subject of Bethlehem 2000. The exhibition will be entitled "Follow the Star: Images from the Palestinian City of Bethlehem at the New Millennium", and it will be officially opened on 29 November at 6 p.m.

For its part, the United Nations system has played a pre-eminent role since the launching of the Bethlehem 2000 project in 1997. The United Nations Development Programme is continuing to participate in a wide range of projects to repair infrastructure and to develop the tourist industry in close cooperation with the municipality of Bethlehem. The World Bank and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization are continuing to play an active part in the project through specific initiatives in the area. The European Commission, non-governmental organizations, donor countries and individuals have made substantial contributions, which have enabled the preparatory work to be finalized in time for the launch of the festivities.

At a time when the world will soon be flooding into Bethlehem, and at a time when the Palestinian people are preparing a generous welcome for all visitors, the Committee hopes that many will respond to the invitation and come to celebrate in peace and hope the birth of Jesus Christ in the Palestinian city of Bethlehem. All are welcome in Bethlehem, that place of pilgrimage where the past and the present meet. In Bethlehem we will honour the heritage of a rich culture and a magnificent

history with millennial traditions. In Bethlehem we will also be able to imagine a future that holds promise for all the peoples of the region — a region that must preserve its role as a crossroads for coming together and for peace for all people of goodwill.

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I now have the honour to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.20, entitled "Bethlehem 2000". In addition to those named in the document, the following countries have also decided to sponsor the draft resolution: France, Guinea, Malta, Namibia, Norway, Portugal, the Russian Federation, San Marino, Spain, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ukraine and Venezuela.

In the draft resolution, the General Assembly welcomes the impending arrival of the historic event which will commemorate both the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem and the beginning of the third millennium in the city which is a symbol of the shared hope for peace among all the peoples of the world. The Assembly then expresses its support for the Bethlehem 2000 project and commends the efforts undertaken by the Palestinian Authority in this regard. It notes with appreciation the assistance already given by the international community in support of the Bethlehem 2000 project and calls for the further increase of assistance and engagement on the part of the international community in order to ensure the complete success of the project.

The draft also requests the Secretary-General to mobilize the pertinent organizations and agencies of the United Nations system to increase their efforts to ensure the success of the project, and decides to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-fifth session the item entitled "Bethlehem 2000" so that the Assembly may continue to support the project until the commemoration comes to a close at Easter 2001.

Allow me to express the profound gratitude of the Committee to Governments, United Nations bodies, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and the sponsors of this important draft resolution. Their generosity and contribution will enable the Palestinian people to fulfil one of their dreams and one of their aspirations. Let us all dare to hope that the celebration of Bethlehem 2000 will enable us to lay the foundations for lasting peace that will endure beyond the festivities, and that it will embody the hope, at the dawn of the next millennium and for years to come, of harmonious coexistence among all the peoples of the region.

In conclusion, allow me also to express the hope that, as was the case last year, all Members will give their unreserved support to this draft resolution and that once again it will be adopted by consensus.

The President: I should like to inform members that, in a letter dated 5 October 1999 addressed to the President of the General Assembly, the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Western European and other States for the month of October, requests that the General Assembly hear in plenary meeting a statement by the observer of the Holy See on agenda item 36, "Bethlehem 2000".

Taking into account the importance attached to the issue under discussion, it is proposed that the General Assembly should take a decision on that request.

May I take it that there is no objection to the proposal to hear a statement by the observer of the Holy See?

It was so decided.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Palestinian city of Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, peace be upon him, is on the threshold of its millennium commemoration, Bethlehem 2000. The forthcoming worldwide celebration of this epic turning point in time is an occasion imbued with profound historical, religious, spiritual and cultural dimensions of high importance for our people, for the other peoples of the region, for the faithful and for the entire international community. Bethlehem, Palestine, is of great historic and symbolic centrality in these celebrations. There, the world will rejoice in the two-thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus and will welcome a new millennium. The General Assembly's consensus adoption of resolution 53/27, the first under this item, was a reflection of both the prominence of the issue and the profound significance and meaning of the occasion.

A dignified, glorious and celebratory commemoration befitting such a historic and momentous occasion is of paramount importance and has been a central priority since the inauguration of the Bethlehem 2000 project in March 1997. In this regard, the organization and preparations for the celebration of this occasion in Bethlehem constitute an enormous endeavour that the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority have undertaken with great pleasure.

Throughout the past year, serious work has been carried out in connection with the Bethlehem 2000 project in spite of the persistent difficulties on the ground caused by the occupation. The most recent examples include the killing of a Palestinian man by an Israeli soldier in Bethlehem and recent plans by Israel, the occupying Power, to establish a border-like checkpoint at the entrance to the city. All the work that has been achieved despite such obstacles reflects the resilience of the Palestinian people and their determination to ensure the success of this commemoration. The atmosphere in and around Bethlehem has already begun to feel different, and there is an enthusiastic readiness to receive the 2 million pilgrims and tourists expected to join in the celebrations and events beginning just prior to Christmas, 1999, continuing throughout 2000 and concluding on Easter, 2001.

The international donor community has also been engaged in the preparations. This includes the United Nations community, particularly the United Nations Development Programme. We also express our deep appreciation for the work and efforts of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People over the past year in this regard. In addition to the initiative it has undertaken with regard to Bethlehem 2000, the Committee will also sponsor the annual exhibit on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, presented in cooperation with our Mission. This year's exhibit is entitled "Follow the star: Images from the Palestinian city of Bethlehem at the new millennium".

This year, the Committee organized a very successful Bethlehem 2000 International Conference in Rome in February. The Conference had the full support and participation of Palestine, Italy, the Holy See, church authorities, the European Commission, the United Nations system and various other international organizations, institutions and non-governmental organizations, as well as of individuals from the academic, cultural and private sectors. Upon its conclusion, the Conference adopted the Rome Declaration on Bethlehem 2000, in which it reaffirmed, *inter alia*, the international community's support for the success of the occasion and expressed appreciation for the funding and assistance provided by the donor community, particularly donor countries, agencies and the private sector.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to all those who have made generous contributions towards this endeavour and who have cooperated with the Palestinian Authority in its effort to ensure the jubilant success of Bethlehem 2000. Continued participation by the international community is, of course, essential. As for the role of the United Nations in this regard, it is our hope that the Organization will continue to play an important role in drawing the attention of the peoples of the world to the importance of this historic universal occasion.

The Palestinian people are proud and honoured to be hosting such a historic occasion, one that we hope will reflect and promote a vision of peace, reconciliation and goodwill for all humankind. We had truly hoped to begin the Bethlehem 2000 celebrations in an independent Palestine. Of course, we are disappointed that this will not be the case. However, we are confident that the second portion of this occasion, including Christmas, 2000, the start of 2001 and the conclusion of the commemorations on Easter, 2001, will be celebrated in an independent Palestine and a peaceful Middle East.

The unanimous adoption of resolution 53/27 by the Assembly during the fifty-third session was hailed by the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference in Rome as a clear reflection of the world community's strong desire to bring an era of dialogue, tolerance and reconciliation to the people of Bethlehem and the entire Middle East. It is our fervent hope that the draft resolution under this item will also receive the support of all the Member States of this Assembly and be adopted by consensus.

Ms. Rasi (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union is particularly pleased to make a statement on a Middle East agenda item and the draft resolution that has an overwhelmingly positive message which can help unite the region in a true celebration. Such a message is most welcome.

The European Union wholeheartedly supports the Bethlehem 2000 project initiated by the Palestinian Authority, the Municipality of Bethlehem and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) with a view to preparing the ancient City of Bethlehem for the start of the new millennium.

The project aims at restoring historical, archaeological and religious sites of unique importance. It also seeks to improve tourist facilities in order to establish Bethlehem as a major tourist destination far beyond the 15-month-long millennium celebration. These development projects, together with numerous others initiated by non-governmental organizations, contribute to the economic growth and development of the whole Bethlehem region.

In May 1998, a conference on Bethlehem 2000 was convened in Brussels in association with the European Commission, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNESCO and the World Bank. The purpose of the conference, for which the European Commission provided logistical support, was to engender the necessary financial commitments from official sources, private donors and potential investors in the private sector. The conference concluded with a series of important pledges to the project.

In February 1999, another international preparatory Bethlehem 2000 conference was held in Rome under the auspices of the United Nations and with the support of the Italian Government. The two-day forum was convened in order to mobilize the widest international support for the Bethlehem 2000 project and its vision of peace and reconciliation. Again, the European Union participated actively in the proceedings.

It is the view of the European Union that development of the tourist sector should be promoted as a priority. It is clearly one of the keys to economic growth in the Bethlehem region. The European Union therefore strongly encourages, in the context of Bethlehem 2000, close coordination and cooperation locally and with the international donor community.

The European Union is providing financial support for Bethlehem 2000 as well as for specific projects such as expansion of the facilities of the nearby Beit Jalla hospital and the renovation of the old city's Manger Square. The European Commission provides support for the upgrading of the infrastructure network.

The major religious, historic and cultural dimensions of the event will require unimpeded access to the holy places in Bethlehem for all those wishing to celebrate the new millennium in this historic city. The United Nations and the whole world will celebrate the new millennium, a celebration which will culminate in the Jubilee ceremonies in Rome on 5 November 2000.

Before concluding, I would like to take this opportunity to express the European Union's appreciation to the Permanent Representative of Senegal, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, for his strenuous efforts to promote the Bethlehem 2000 project.

Last but not least, the European Union reaffirms its firm commitment to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and all the subsequent achievements of the Middle East peace process. Recognizing the importance of a sound economy to social and political stability, the European Union will continue its considerable economic and technical assistance to the Palestinians with a view to contributing to a more secure and prosperous future for them in the next millennium.

Mr. Jasmi (Malaysia): The Bethlehem 2000 project, a monumental event to celebrate the new millennium in Bethlehem in a global vision of peace and reconciliation, will commence this Christmas. My delegation views this celebration as not just to welcome the advent of the third millennium but also as a renewal of faith, hope and peace for the peoples of the world, in particular the Palestinian people. We want to see this celebration as an opportunity for building peace and stability in the region and as a springboard or catalyst for economic rehabilitation and development for the historic city and its surrounding area.

My delegation notes the report of the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference, convened in Rome last February, and is gratified that much progress had been made to achieve the objectives of this project. We commend the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its efforts in promoting the Bethlehem 2000 project in support of the initiative by the Palestinian National Authority.

We also wish to record our appreciation for the work of the United Nations agencies like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for their cooperation with the Palestinian Authority and the Bethlehem municipality in the restoration and preservation works of the city. My delegation recognises the contributions made by Governments, intergovernmental bodies and the private sectors to the project.

We also thank the international financial institutions like the World Bank and the international donor community for providing the funds needed to carry out the project. However, as mentioned by the coordinator of the project, financial and technical help are still needed. We therefore hope that there will be additional offers of international assistance and support to ensure the success of this project.

My delegation believes that the Bethlehem 2000 project is not just for the Palestinian people. The city of Bethlehem is one of the most historic and religiously significant sites on earth, visited by thousands of pilgrims and tourists every year. The infrastructure-building project will help to cater to the needs of the roughly 2 million visitors expected next year, and it is also badly needed by the 125,000 or more people who live in Bethlehem. Improvements in the roads and in the water, electricity, sewage and waste-management systems will help to ameliorate the living conditions in this city of great historical and religious importance.

The Bethlehem 2000 project has given the international community a chance to participate in a project of international religious, cultural and historical significance. International participation in this project would reinforce the culture of peace, tolerance and forgiveness, and provide renewed vigour to the push for peace in the region. We believe lasting peace can be achieved only through the exercise by the Palestinian people of their right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State of Palestine.

My delegation is pleased to co-sponsor this draft resolution. We earnestly hope it will be adopted unanimously by the Assembly as a manifestation of universal support for this project and of the hope for a lasting peace for Palestine and the region.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Next year will be a year of celebrations for Christians throughout the world. They will be commemorating the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. All peace-loving people will be taking part in these celebrations which will be held in the historic city of Bethlehem. Naturally, the commemoration of Jesus Christ's birth is of religious and historic importance, not only for the Palestinian people but for the whole world. These festivities, now being prepared in the city of Bethlehem, will bring together, in a spirit of solidarity, tolerance, peaceful coexistence and hope, representatives of religious authorities, peoples, individuals and institutions from around the world. The spirit of peace, of which Jesus Christ is a symbol, will be a message for the whole world. We will all try to promote this message of peace in the Middle East region.

Egypt is aware of the intensive efforts that the Palestinian Authority has made in preparing for this commemoration. Egypt believes that the support provide to the Palestinians by the United Nations, the specialized agencies and Member States will have a profound impact on the success of the festivities. For this event to be successful, there needs to be an upgrading of Bethlehem's infrastructure — including its water, electricity and health-services facilities — and of basic social services, such as medical, police and transportation services. This endeavour must also include the implementation of plans to provide basic services for the more than 2 million visitors and tourists who are expected in Bethlehem for the commemoration of this historic event.

Egypt wishes to express its gratitude for the aid provided by various donors to the Bethlehem 2000 project. On behalf of my delegation, I would like to express the hope that this aid, particularly that coming from the private sector, will continue. Moreover, we are counting on the support of the Secretary-General to mobilize the relevant United Nations agencies and bodies to provide the support necessary for the success of these festivities.

Egypt hopes that the Israeli authorities will provide additional cooperation and show increased flexibility in order to create the necessary conditions for the channelling of international aid to the organizers of this event. Israeli actions should include the elimination of any obstacles to unrestricted circulation and unrestricted access to the holy sites in this historic city. We also hope that the peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question will be sped up so that the festivities can take place in an atmosphere of desired peace.

The draft resolution before the Assembly today, co-sponsored by Egypt, reflects the importance with which the international community views this magnificent event. The parties concerned have urged that this draft resolution be adopted by consensus for the second straight year. This appeal reflects everyone's desire to create an atmosphere conducive to Bethlehem's inauguration of the third Christian millennium.

In conclusion, I cannot fail to reaffirm that the Government of Egypt and its religious and cultural institutions will contribute to making the festivities of

Bethlehem 2000 a success. Our participation in these festivities is commensurate with the importance that we accord to this great historic event.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): On the eve of the third millennium, the great, holy and historic city of Bethlehem will launch a universal celebration of peace and hope in Palestine. Given the momentous worldwide religious and historic significance of this event and its vital importance to the Palestinian people and to the people of the region, it is incumbent upon the United Nations to continue to support and fully participate in the Bethlehem 2000 project, which will commence at Christmas, 1999, and conclude at Easter, 2001. These important celebrations will last for more than an entire year. We commend President Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority for their efforts in launching the project.

At the invitation of President Arafat, world leaders, including former South African President Nelson Mandela, agreed to participate in the international Bethlehem 2000 Committee. This attests to the vital significance South Africa attaches and will continue to attach to this international event.

At the Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement held in September this year in New York, the Ministers reaffirmed their support for the Bethlehem 2000 project in the Palestinian city of Bethlehem and expressed confidence that the increased assistance and engagement of the international community will ensure the successful commemoration of the event. We commend the bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, under the able leadership of Ambassador Ibra Ka of Senegal, for promoting this very important initiative.

The successful implementation of the Bethlehem 2000 project has the potential to become a catalyst for a new era of peace, reconciliation and the promotion of dialogue. President Arafat, in his address to the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference in Rome, hosted by the Government of Italy in February 1999, stated that:

> "From Bethlehem, as of the first moment of the third millennium, we shall send a call of peace to all the peoples of the world, a call for security to all the peoples, and a call for the dedication of all efforts and resources to building and development instead of violence, occupation and conflict".

Continued financial assistance from the international community for the Bethlehem 2000 project is needed for the creation of a strong, self-sufficient and sustainable economic infrastructure for Bethlehem that would provide a sound underpinning for social and political stability, which is a prerequisite for peace in the region.

As part of the project, preparations are under way to renovate the historic city of Bethlehem in order to preserve its heritage and restore its splendour. We must reverse the ravaging effects of poverty on this city. Time has taken its toll on this great city. The decades of conflict have also left their scars on this city. The international community must at least ensure that Bethlehem has all the necessary facilities for the growing population that calls it home.

An important objective of the project is to enhance the attraction of Bethlehem to tourists and pilgrims during this period and to contribute to the promotion of a wider goal for the region: that of Bethlehem as a major tourist venue.

We commend the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank and other United Nations organizations and agencies which will play an important role in ensuring the success of this major undertaking. This project warrants the support of the entire international community. Furthermore, we join in supporting the Secretary-General in his continuing efforts to mobilize the relevant United Nations organizations and agencies in this regard. Financial commitments have also been received from donor countries and non-governmental organizations.

However, it must be emphasized that success will not be attained if believers of all faiths, citizens of all nationalities and visitors from around the world participating in this celebration do not have unimpeded access to activities.

South Africa firmly believes that the peace process is the only means of ensuring lasting peace, security and stability in the region. After the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum in September, the South African Government congratulated the Israeli and Palestinian sides, commending them on this significant development and adding that, while the path towards a final status agreement would be a difficult one indeed, the agreement reached at Sharm el-Sheikh boded well for the type of

cooperation which alone could result in the achievement of a just and lasting peace.

It is indeed our fervent hope that the current peace process towards reaching a final settlement between the Israeli and Palestinian sides will continue with renewed vigour, thereby contributing to the celebration of the Bethlehem 2000 project in a spirit of peace, tolerance and reconciliation.

Ms. Matlary (Norway): I am very pleased to make a statement on agenda item 36, "Bethlehem 2000". The initiative taken by the Palestinian Authority, the municipality of Bethlehem and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to establish the Bethlehem 2000 project was much appreciated by my Government. Many others have contributed to the promotion of this valuable project and I would like to take this opportunity to extend a word of appreciation to the Permanent Representative of Senegal, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, for his tireless efforts to promote Bethlehem.

The celebration of the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ and the beginning of the new millennium is of great importance not only to the Palestinian people and the region, but also to members of the international community. Christ's message was one of radical solidarity between all human beings. "Am I my brother's keeper?". The answer is yes. Genuine peace is conditional on respect for all and love for all. This is indeed a tall order, given our natural inclination to selfishness, but it is not an unattainable goal. It is up to us to choose peace. As we stand at the threshold of a new millennium, it is our responsibility to help the ancient city of Bethlehem preserve its historical heritage and secure its place as a symbol of peace and reconciliation for future generations.

The Bethlehem 2000 project is an ambitious programme of cultural and religious celebration. It is, at the same time, a project for urban and economic rejuvenation and tourist development and promotion. We expect it to make a lasting contribution to economic growth and social development in the Bethlehem region. The further potential for tourism in the region is very significant and the project should make an important contribution to the effort to further increase the popularity of Bethlehem as a tourist destination. Economic growth and social development are important elements in our common efforts to contribute to this peace in the Middle East.

This is the background for Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik's decision to join the Bethlehem 2000 International Committee, along with other state leaders. Norway is proud of its association with the Bethlehem 2000 project. Norway welcomes the call for a strong and increased international engagement with the project. Norway views Bethlehem 2000 as an opportunity to broaden the donor nations' commitment to reconciliation and peace in the Middle East. It is also an opportunity to focus on the reconstruction and development efforts of the Palestinians.

Norway is pleased to be able to participate in the preparations for the celebration, and we are supporting the effort with approximately $5 million in 1998 and 1999. These funds are earmarked particularly for rehabilitation work in the Old City and neighbouring municipalities. We encourage other donors to step up their efforts to support this important project.

Norway is planning several cultural and religious events during the 16 months of celebration. These will take place not only in Bethlehem, but also in other cities in the Palestinian area.

It is our hope that the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ will inspire us all to work for peace and reconciliation, based on his call for tolerance, respect and love for one's neighbours.

Blessed are the peacemakers.

Mr. Fulci (Italy): Allow me to add some considerations to the statement already made by the Permanent Representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union, which we fully endorse.

Italy has witnessed with concern the tensions and difficulties experienced by the Middle East in recent years. The geographic proximity of my country to the region, and our historical and cultural links with it, make us particularly sensitive to crises in that part of the world.

This explains why my country has always tried to foster every initiative aimed at restoring peace and good relations in the area, while assisting peoples that have suffered divisions, confrontations and conflicts year after year.

The idea of celebrating the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem has

appeared to us to be an initiative of special significance ever since it was first announced in 1997, which was exactly the year when the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority came to a stalemate.

A series of initiatives had to be launched — on the one hand to press for renewed dialogue and mutual understanding, and on the other to promote solidarity and a concrete commitment from the international community to the people of the region. Italy was one of the very first to assure a substantial contribution to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization for drafting and implementing a concrete plan. To this end, almost $3 million has been pledged by the Government of Italy.

In addition, on 18 and 19 February of this year, Rome hosted a second preparatory Conference, after that of Brussels, with the participation of numerous countries, United Nations agencies and governmental and non-governmental organizations. President Arafat deserves our gratitude for attending the event personally and for the new message of peace that he launched from Rome. Likewise, we owe thanks to the Foreign Minister of Senegal, Mr. Jacques Baudin, and to his country's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for his dedication and considerable achievements.

Rather than chance, it was the hand of history that allowed the Bethlehem 2000 celebrations to occur at a moment of great hope for the achievement of a definitive and just peace in the Middle East.

In our opinion, at least two other aspects of the Bethlehem 2000 project deserve mention. The first is the universal message of peace that it embodies. Bethlehem 2000 aims to help the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, but in a broader perspective it is part of the dialogue among civilizations that the General Assembly has once again inserted into this year's agenda. Rather than just an occasion to celebrate a meeting between countries and Governments, Bethlehem 2000 is meant to be an invitation to dialogue — dialogue among peoples and cultures — and, above all, between the three great monotheistic religions that originated in the Holy Land.

We should all appreciate the universal message of an event that invites every population in every corner of the world to reflect, at the beginning of the third millennium, on shared moral and social values and the common aspiration to peace and mutual understanding.

The simultaneous celebration of the great jubilee in Rome, originating in the ancient traditions of the Catholic Church, moves in the same direction, sending from The Eternal City an identical message of concord and brotherhood to all the peoples of the world.

The celebration of Bethlehem 2000 also calls for some pragmatic, but no less important, considerations. I am referring to the economic initiatives that are an integral part of the project. We all know that this is a time at which international conferences, congresses, symposia, meetings and celebrations of all kinds are being held everywhere. Most of these events will not have lasting consequences, despite their costs in the tens, if not in the hundreds, of millions of dollars. Rarely have resources thus employed had a lasting impact on local economies: we get accustomed to spending enormous amounts of money to talk about poverty, for instance, but at the same time the poor are too often left only with piles of new reports, new studies and new papers.

On the other hand, Bethlehem 2000 is conceived not just as a series of cultural events but also as a concrete means of promoting tourism to Palestine, creating new hospitality structures, recovering the archaeological heritage and local culture and strengthening civil infrastructures. It constitutes a form of genuine assistance to the people and to all those who visit the birthplace of Christ every year. The effect of the celebrations is not meant to end next year, but instead to continue to be reflected on the lives of tens of thousands of people.

Here we have an example that should help us reflect on the many celebrations and gatherings that we are about to initiate. Like Bethlehem 2000, these should all have concrete follow-up and not be an end in themselves. This is why the movers and doers involved in this project should be sincerely commended for their efforts, in which we wish them every success.

Mr. Filippi Balestra (San Marino): The Republic of San Marino attaches great importance to the initiative entitled "Bethlehem 2000", launched by the Palestinian Authority in 1997.

My country has consistently followed the tormented issues that have characterized the more general question of the search for peace in the region of the Middle East, and we welcome the results of the peace negotiations

although we note that there is still a long way to go. We assure the Assembly of our contribution to endeavours to overcome division and conflict, the avoidance of violence and abuse and the promotion of the choice of dialogue and negotiations towards equitable and peaceful solutions among the parties involved. Those solutions will have to be reached with respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of all peoples and of all individuals living in the region.

Bethlehem 2000 was born in this context and with this aim. It represents a unique opportunity to join hands in a spirit of dialogue, reconciliation, forgiveness, coexistence and peace.

For this reason, San Marino believes that it is essential that such a project, aimed at the restoration of historic religious sites in Bethlehem and its infrastructure be completed before the event takes place.

General Assembly resolution 53/27, adopted by consensus, represents clear evidence of the world community's desire to bring about a new era of dialogue and reconciliation in the region, and we strongly hope that this new era coincides with the beginning of the new millennium.

San Marino followed with great attention the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. We admire and cherish the work of its Chairman and its members. We took active part in the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference, organized in cooperation with the Italian Government and the Holy See, and we welcome the adoption of the Rome Declaration, which emphasized the need to bring economic recovery and prosperity to the Palestinian people.

San Marino wishes to take part in this important and significant event with a concrete contribution in keeping with its traditional vocation of solidarity and peace.

We are aware that Bethlehem is not only a city of holy places, but also a place where people have to live. Reliable infrastructure, such as health-care, educational and residential and commercial facilities, is needed. People from Bethlehem have the right to fulfil their needs and expectations just like those living in any other city in the world.

This is the reason why our Republic, having always paid particular attention to social and humanitarian interventions in favour of war-stricken children or suffering and needy populations, decided to finance a project entailing the creation infrastructures for children. We are currently defining the practical aspects and the size of this project.

This initiative represents for us a meaningful sign of the solidarity of the San Marino Government and people and an invitation to continue to strengthen the efforts towards peace and peaceful coexistence in the region.

With the hope that such values will find more and more support, San Marino cherishes all international efforts, and especially the significant role of the United Nations.

Mr. Rodríguez-Parrilla (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): As the twentieth century and the second millennium are drawing to a close, the world's peoples are renewing their hope of achieving the ideals of peace and understanding to which we all aspire.

In this context, any initiative that in one way or another promotes the process of peace and reconciliation in the Middle East should be given our complete support, and this is why, in the view of our delegation, the item under consideration today, "Bethlehem 2000", is of extraordinary importance.

Undoubtedly, the city of Bethlehem is, historically, culturally and religiously, one of the richest places in the world. In the year 2000, the past and the future will converge there, with hope for a world free of hatred, a world of solidarity and cooperation.

That celebration in Bethlehem will be of extraordinary importance not only to Palestine and the Middle East, but also to the entire international community. The fact that over 2 million visitors will surely arrive in Bethlehem for the occasion and the massive preparations that this will require, make it clear that we must all work for the success of this monumental project.

Unfortunately, the city of Bethlehem, like other Palestinian cities, has suffered serious damage to its infrastructure as a result of years of occupation. It is for this reason that if we want the commemoration truly to lead us to a process of reflection and action in the search for peace for all peoples of the world without exception, it is essential that unconditional support be given to this event. We are pleased to confirm that a number of United Nations organs and programmes, as well as

various intergovernmental organizations, have already made financial and technical contributions to the preparations, and we hope that there will be more such efforts in the immediate future.

Cuba completely shares the wish for a solution to be found to the problems of the Middle East, and this inevitably includes a definitive solution to the Palestinian problem, which constitutes its cornerstone.

The Bethlehem 2000 initiative comes at a crucial point in the evolution of the conflict in the Middle East. We hope that the celebrations will further strengthen the forces of cooperation and justice and that this will have a positive effect on the peace process. The question of Palestine is at a particularly complex point. In spite of concrete advances in the negotiating process, a great deal remains to be done for the attainment of a lasting and satisfactory solution for the noble and valiant people of Palestine and for the rest of the peoples that live in the Arab territories under occupation. We are convinced that Bethlehem 2000 will be a very important step along that path.

We also hope that the celebrations will be of economic benefit to the Palestinian people, which needs such benefits in order to advance the process of reconstruction and the establishment of a new infrastructure and a solid basis for their economy.

I do not wish to conclude without expressing our satisfaction at the results obtained by the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference, which was held in Rome on 18 and 19 February 1999, at which personalities from all over the world met in the capital of Italy to review, *inter alia*, the preparations and the requirements of this important occasion.

For my delegation it is a real honour to have joined in sponsoring draft resolution A/54/L.20, which is now before the Assembly for consideration and which reflects the will and the desire of the international community to advance towards its noble objectives.

I wish to urge all delegations to work together and to join in the consensus on this historic project, which will strengthen our message of fraternity and peace.

Please be assured that the Cuban Government will work for the success of the Bethlehem 2000 project.

Bethlehem is a city of peace. The gathering of thousands of people from many nations and religions, coming with sincere intentions and a true desire to achieve self-improvement, can only consolidate peace in the world. Thus, a spiritual union will occur between hundreds of thousands of people coming from distant places all over the world to visit Bethlehem. Believers in the religion of Abraham will share in this blessed event. Followers of different faiths will surely respect what is considered blessed by a large part of mankind, for all human beings, irrespective of their religious beliefs, are brothers and sisters.

Together with Chairman Ka and other members of the Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I had the honour of participating in the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference, which was held in Rome on 18 and 19 February 1999, where representatives of many religious communities were present. I was fortunate enough to be able to perceive beforehand a feeling of just how much Bethlehem 2000 would serve regional and world peace when it is celebrated in the Holy Land.

This celebration coincides with the emergence of hope for swift and substantial progress in the Middle East peace process, leading to a final settlement between the Palestinian and Israeli sides in the course of the year 2000. This is why the draft resolution welcomes the impending global, historic celebration in Bethlehem of the birth of Jesus Christ. The new millennium must be celebrated in a manner befitting an atmosphere conducive to peace, reconciliation, concord and harmony. This draft resolution, with all the lofty values it contains, deserves to be unanimously adopted without a vote.

Mr. Moushoutas (Cyprus): The item entitled "Bethlehem 2000" was inscribed on the agenda of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly in accordance with resolution 53/27 so that we could be given the opportunity to reaffirm our support for the historic commemoration immediately prior to the occasion.

We are now witnessing the fading away of the twentieth century, and we are at the threshold of the third millennium. In welcoming the impending global celebration in Bethlehem, we inevitably reflect upon the past and ponder the future. We call to mind the humble birth in Bethlehem of Jesus, who, as the Nuncio has told us, is identified with the weak, the rootless and the persecuted and who undertook to liberate man from man and man from himself. His teachings of mercy, compassion and forgiveness are legacies for all mankind.

We think of our own unending struggle to secure peace and justice, measuring our limited successes and, at the same time, counting our failures. They are too numerous to be overlooked. We wonder what the results might have been if we had followed the road of understanding and compassion. Bethlehem 2000 gives us the opportunity to ponder and to reassess.

Bethlehem, Palestine, is geographically close to Cyprus. It is even closer spiritually and sentimentally. The millennium event is of paramount importance to us, as it is for the whole of mankind. Situated as we are at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, we are directly affected by any developments in the region, whether they are developments of peace or of conflict. We therefore welcome the rejuvenation of the peace process. It is our earnest hope that it will produce final, positive results so that the peoples of the area may at last embark on a future of peace and reconstruction. Bethlehem 2000 can be an important contribution to that end. It can positively affect the peace process, especially now that the winds of peace are again sweeping over the region and carrying the voices, loud and clear, of reconciliation.

No effort should be spared in the pursuit of a comprehensive, final and just solution to the problems of the Middle East. Their successful conclusion on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions will benefit the peoples of the region — including the people of Cyprus, who live with the vision of a free, united and peaceful island, without foreign troops and barbed wire and with its people integrated and cooperating as they did for centuries in the past.

We commend the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chairman, the Ambassador of Senegal, for taking the initiative to commemorate this event. We view it as a step of participation by the international community in the ongoing peace process and a reflection of the world's strong desire to bring an era of dialogue, tolerance and reconciliation both to the people of Bethlehem and to the entire Middle East.

Care must be taken in the organizational aspects of this historical and religious event. With 2 million tourists expected to visit the area, freedom of movement and unhindered safe access to the Holy Places by the faithful of all religions and nationalities must be assured. The Holy Land must be just that: holy, a place of harmony, peace and hope. The success of the project will pave the way for establishing the Palestinian territories as a major tourist destination in the Middle East well after the celebration of the year 2000.

In reiterating our full support for this historic event, we commend the Palestinian authorities for the important work they are carrying out with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Bank and other United Nations organizations to ensure the success of this global celebration. We also commend the international donors, whose contributions will ensure a successful outcome of this endeavour so dear to the hearts of millions and millions of people.

Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia): The item entitled "Bethlehem 2000" is being considered by the General Assembly at an auspicious moment in history. We would like to express our gratitude to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, under the leadership of Mr. Ka of Senegal, for its contributions and for mobilizing international support for this noble endeavour. Our deliberations today send a resounding message of peace, in accordance with the long-cherished aspirations of the Palestinian people, and indeed of all the people of the region, for the achievement of peace and prosperity in the Middle East.

Indonesia fully supports the inclusion of the item entitled "Bethlehem 2000" and deems it a distinct pleasure once again to be a co-sponsor of the draft resolution on this question. We were also gratified to have participated in the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference, held in Rome on 18 and 19 February 1999. Its convening was important, as it provided an opportunity for a useful exchange of views towards finding the best possible approaches to implementing the project.

The commemoration of the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem and the heralding of the third millennium deserve our full support. The holding of this monumental and historic event in this holy Palestinian city is most relevant and appropriate, as it symbolizes the shared hopes for peace among all peoples in the world. In this cradle of the world's religions, Jesus Christ, Prophet Mohammed and other great Prophets preached the message of peace and tolerance to mankind. Therefore this project should be one of participation, not only for the Palestinian people but also for the entire international community.

There could be no better place in the world than this holy site to usher in a new millennium with expectations for peace and justice for future generations. Besides its profound historical, religious and cultural dimensions, the project has great significance for the economic and social development of the Palestinians. Bethlehem should be the shining star in a free and independent Palestine, where the yearning of a whole people for freedom and independence will soon become a reality. It should mark the beginning of a period of coexistence and reconciliation of the peoples in the region, and a starting point for a peaceful and harmonious future. Towards this end, our efforts are necessary to improve the infrastructure of the ancient city of Bethlehem, so that it can be restored to its former glory and splendour, thereby promoting tourism for the nascent Palestinian state. We await the commencement of interesting events, which will begin at Christmas 1999 and continue until Easter 2001.

We laud the untiring efforts of the Palestinian National Authority, under President Yasser Arafat, to make this event momentous for the international community. It also offers an opportunity to foster a closer understanding of different cultures and religious beliefs, thereby putting an end to decades of mistrust and misunderstanding. It is an occasion for all to come together and place aspects of life and faith in the appropriate perspective. It bolsters our hopes and expectations of a reinvigorated climate of amity, mutual trust and understanding among all peoples, irrespective of race, creed or religion. This era of peace can take root and flourish only if the Palestinian people exercise their inalienable rights to self-determination and independence, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as their capital.

Hence we should send a message from Bethlehem to all peoples around the globe for stable peace and common security, as well as a call for dedicated efforts to economic, social and cultural development, while relegating violence, occupation and conflict to a tragic chapter of Palestinian history. We should therefore spare no effort to ensure the success of this historic event of universal significance so that it can be a celebration of our collective aspirations for enduring harmony among peoples and nations.

Mr. Mabilangan (Philippines): Much has happened and much has been done since we first considered this agenda item at our previous session. United Nations agencies, Governments, the private sector and other members of civil society have come together and focused their creative energies, time and resources on the meaningful realization of the Bethlehem 2000 project.

The Philippines would like to credit the Palestinian Authority, the municipality of Bethlehem and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for initiating and taking the lead on this project. We would also like to express to them the appreciation of a grateful people for allowing us to share in this sacred and blessed event.

Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus Christ, as well as the onset of the new millennium, are of monumental importance and have deep significance for a great many people. The Philippines, far as it is from Bethlehem, feels a closeness and oneness with everyone commemorating this event. The Philippines has warmly welcomed the Bethlehem 2000 project and, fully aware of the dedication and commitment of the people and organizations behind it, is certain of its success.

We knew early on that Bethlehem 2000 would receive the fullest support, not only because we all sincerely cherish the unique historical, cultural and religious significance of Bethlehem, but also because the commemoration of Bethlehem 2000 will bring the world to one place to renew our common commitment to peace, tolerance and understanding — not just for the moment when the third millennium begins or for the duration of the celebrations, but for all time.

The draft resolution before us calls on the international community to support the Bethlehem 2000 project. This is no easy task, as the amounts involved are rather large. It is indeed daunting to think of the preparation and work involved, but with everyone giving a helping hand, the success of Bethlehem 2000 should be ensured. The universality and importance of this project, and the desire of all to see it succeed, will ensure that the project will not lack support.

Today we feel increasingly convinced about, and sense the urgency of, supporting Bethlehem 2000. We recognize and support the importance of reconstructing the historic sites of the Holy Land, of preserving the historic and religious importance of Bethlehem and of instilling a spirit of harmony and solidarity in the peoples of that area, and indeed of the Middle East. We also believe that the Bethlehem 2000 project has a distinct spiritual value, over and above other important economic concerns, and that this event, which commemorates the birth of Christ, must be shielded from harmful and unnecessary political hindrances that could frustrate its legitimate goal. Let us all help in promoting and

honouring mankind's sacred benefactor, born in Bethlehem 2000 years ago.

At the beginning of my statement I said that much has been achieved since we last discussed Bethlehem 2000. But much more remains to be done. The peace process has moved forward, but reconciliation and enduring peace have been elusive. The commemoration of the arrival of the messenger of peace will be even more meaningful if we ourselves bring peace, justice, dignity and reconciliation to the people of Palestine and to the Middle East.

The historical, archaeological and religious sites in Bethlehem bear witness not only to the birth of Jesus Christ but also to the struggles and sacrifices of a brave and persevering people and their quest for peace. As we move to preserve these sites, we must also exert every effort to leave a testament of peace and understanding in the Middle East.

Before concluding, may I commend and express our appreciation to the Permanent Representative of Senegal, Ambassador Ibra Ka, for his and his group's untiring efforts to promote Bethlehem 2000.

As we approach the conclusion of our debates in this millennium, and as we stand on the frontier of the new millennium, we can only remain hopeful and expectant that the years ahead hold good promise for all our work in our common quest for peace, harmony and prosperity. Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus hold the promise of our salvation, which I know will be with all of us. We must come to Bethlehem 2000 bearing our desire and commitment for peace, harmony and goodwill as gifts to the child in the manger.

Mr. Andjaba (Namibia): We are moving closer to the dawn of the new millennium and the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ in the city of Bethlehem. This historic event will be celebrated for a period beginning at Christmas this year and concluding at Easter 2001. This is an event which will be of considerable importance not only for the Palestinian people and the Middle East region, but for the international community as a whole, as it has significant religious, historical and cultural dimensions. I have taken the floor today to reaffirm my delegation's participation in this important event and to pledge our further support in organizing it through the Bethlehem 2000 project.

Since the Palestinian Authority launched the Bethlehem 2000 project, the vast challenges facing the organizers of the event have become well known. It is clear that it is up to us, the members of the international community, to contribute positively to ensure that Bethlehem 2000 is successful and to strengthen the event as a symbol of hope and peace. Various significant contributions have already been made and we are convinced that many more will be forthcoming.

One of the achievements in the preparations for the celebrations was the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference, which was held in Rome in February this year, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in cooperation with the Government of Italy and the Holy See. In adopting the Rome Declaration, the Conference undoubtedly contributed enormously to the organization of this historic event and to ensuring the broadest possible international participation. The Conference also significantly promoted the entire Middle East peace process.

The important role of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People — and particularly the efforts by its Chairman, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka of Senegal, to increase international awareness and support for the Bethlehem 2000 event through activities like the Rome International Conference, the African meeting in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestine People, held in Windhoek in April this year, the Cairo meetings held in June this year, and through art exhibitions and other methods — deserves our highest praise. We are convinced that with such leadership and with assistance from other actors, the Bethlehem 2000 celebrations will be highly successful and will sustain the message of peace and reconciliation for all humankind.

Finally, my delegation fully supports the draft resolution entitled "Bethlehem 2000". We regard it as an ideal instrument through which all of us can express our support for the strong message of peace it carries. It is our hope that it will be adopted without a vote.

Mr. Miranda (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): From their very beginnings, human beings have used the commemoration of events and circumstances that are considered important as opportunities for reflecting on the road already travelled, on their situation at the time and on their prospects for the future. Today, we stand on the threshold of the third millennium since the birth of Jesus in the Palestinian city of Bethlehem. This is a time of special significance, a time of meditation and of

rejoicing. Given those circumstances, we are turning to a symbol of peace, reconciliation, understanding, solidarity and justice. This symbol — the celebration of Bethlehem 2000 — has received the solid support and recognition of the countries of this Organization since the fifty-third session of the General Assembly through resolution 53/27, because it represents precisely those values that are the constant aspiration of the entire international community.

The importance that the international community attaches to this celebration gives rise to the desire to establish an atmosphere of peace and confidence that promotes dialogue, tolerance and cooperation for the benefit of all peoples, of different religions, cultures and nationalities. This is a fitting context in which to reiterate the fact that the best way of recognizing and celebrating the history and the future of the city of Bethlehem will be the attainment of a mutually satisfactory agreement of peace and reconciliation. Current circumstances allow us new hopes and new grounds for trust that with determination and will it will be possible to achieve that long-held aspiration to attain peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

The Bethlehem 2000 project seeks to celebrate, through cultural, artistic and religious events, the advent of the new millennium, with the participation of individuals of all ages and religions from every corner of the world, inspired by the message of peace and hope that the city has projected for 2000 years. That is why the delegation of Peru once again welcomes this initiative and hopes that during the next stage the relevant bodies will provide the necessary assurances for free and unimpeded access to the holy places for the faithful of all religions and for people of all nationalities.

Mr. Morel (Seychelles), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We wish also to reiterate the appeal for the financial support needed for the complete success of the project, whose purposes also include improving the infrastructure and services of that centre of pilgrimage and simultaneously to preserve its historic legacy, religious value and cultural heritage. Here, we want to call attention to the cooperation provided by the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the World Bank.

The delegation of Peru wishes the Bethlehem 2000 project every success. It recalls once again the values it symbolizes and hopes that it will mark the beginning of a new era of peaceful coexistence, mutual understanding and cooperation among all human beings.

Mr. Akopian (Armenia): Let me begin by expressing my Government's support for the Bethlehem 2000 project initiated by the Palestinian National Authority, and for draft resolution A/54/L.11, entitled "Bethlehem 2000"; this is the second consecutive year that such a text has been submitted to the General Assembly for its consideration. We would also like to express our appreciation to all the countries and international and non-governmental organizations which are contributing to the success of this unique international project, and to express our thanks to the Government of Italy for hosting the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference in Rome on 18 and 19 February 1999.

It is only for the second time in history that mankind is making the transition to a new millennium. The first time, the expectations for the new millennium were of an apocalyptic nature. Mankind was terrified of the year 1000 and was helpless in the face of its horror. Today, as we approach the last year of this millennium, we are not horrified, but hopeful. Not surprisingly, the symbol of the turn of the millennium this second time is the town of Bethlehem in the Holy Land, where Jesus Christ was born 2,000 years ago, bringing a message of love, peace, forgiveness and tolerance. The Bethlehem 2000 project aims at reviving the town's municipal infrastructure, which is very important in a region where economic degradation adds very dangerously to political tension. We hope that the project will bring economic benefits to the peoples of the region, who need to see the practical results of the peace process. But at the same time, Bethlehem 2000 provides us with a unique chance to return to our spiritual cradle and, through its renewal, to regain global hope for peace and reconciliation.

The 16-month-long programme of millennium celebrations proposed by the Palestinian Authority is impressive, and it certainly deserves to be supported and promoted by the international community. The consideration in the General Assembly of the item "Bethlehem 2000" and the important role played by the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank and other organizations and agencies of the United Nations system constitute the best evidence of such support and promotion. Active engagement of the international donor community in the development of Bethlehem's basic infrastructure, public services and tourist facilities and in the preservation of its

rich cultural heritage is also essential for ensuring the success of the project.

We would like to stress the importance of the cultural programme of the Bethlehem 2000 project. The language of the arts is the most perfect one; it allows diverse nations to communicate spiritually and to establish ties on a very subtle level. We hope to witness in Bethlehem an unprecedented year-long arts festival which will bring together diverse cultures and unify them in a strong appeal for peace and understanding. And in this respect it is worth remembering that Bethlehem was also the birthplace of King David, who apart from being one of the greatest kings of Israel, was also an outstanding man of the arts.

For us Armenians the Holy Land and the town of Bethlehem are not only religious symbols and political realities. The Holy Land is a place where Armenians have been living for some 16 centuries as a well organized community with its own national and religious institutions concentrated in the Armenian quarter, which is one of four historical quarters of the Old City of Jerusalem. An Armenian Patriarchate was established in Jerusalem after Armenia adopted Christianity as its official religion in the year 301, thus becoming the first Christian nation in the world. In 2001 we, under the patronage of UNESCO, will celebrate the one-thousand-seven-hundredth anniversary of that significant event in our history, in a certain way preserving and echoing the spirit of the Bethlehem 2000 project. The Armenian Apostolic Church shares equal responsibility with the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches as custodian of holy sites of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and other cities. We believe that this project will ensure increased safe access to the holy sites in the future for believers of all religions, which is very important for creating and preserving an atmosphere of mutual confidence and understanding.

Those are the reasons why we are not indifferent to issues related to the Holy Land. Having thousands of our compatriots living in Israel and in the area of Palestinian autonomy, we are vitally interested in peace and stability in that part of the world. We are optimistic that the Middle East peace process will continue on the right track, thus ensuring a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region. We are hopeful that the Bethlehem 2000 project will be remembered by future generations as the beginning of a new era in the history of the Middle East: an era of peace under the star of Bethlehem.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/265 of 24 August 1994, I now call on the observer for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta.

Mr. Linati-Bosch (Sovereign Military Order of Malta): I am grateful for this opportunity to address the General Assembly on behalf of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. The Order of Malta was founded in Jerusalem 900 years ago, and its history is related to the historical development of the Holy Land, a fact that highlights the legitimacy of our interest in all matters related to present-day Palestine.

It is not my intention to talk about memories and remembrances, but allow me to recall that in 1949 the United Nations was considering the possibility of granting international status to the holy sites through an agreement among several Powers and the Vatican State, and of giving the Sovereign Order an administrative and authoritative role.

Today, the activities of the Order are exemplified by its presence in Tantur since the end of the nineteenth century by virtue of an agreement between the Order and the Ottoman Empire, and especially by the Holy Family maternity hospital in Bethlehem, which conducts almost 3,000 deliveries per year. The hospital serves the greater Bethlehem area, including Hebron, and carries out 40,000 consultations annually. It also operates four outreach clinics to provide care to pregnant mothers in their villages; its capacity will be expanded in the near future. The activities of the Order in the Holy Land are conducted through the Holy Land Foundation of the Order of Malta.

We all know that problems cannot be considered unilaterally or as isolated phenomena, as one problem is always connected with other problems and, at the same time, is a consequence of its own complexity. The Holy Land is the best of examples. The problem of the Holy Land is a multiform one with aspects related to economic, social, historical, religious and cultural issues, including armed conflicts. This means that it would be useless to reach a solution if it did not involve all these facets according to the principle of law that a legal norm must be clear, just, possible to apply, based on justice and adequate to the moment and the circumstances.

There is a consensus in the admission that the Palestinian problem must reach a satisfactory solution. Obviously, it is not easy to arrive at this happy ending. As we said before, the historical roots of the problem, its religious implications, economic reasons and many other

difficulties make the way to peace a very difficult one. Consequently, the launching of the Bethlehem 2000 project cannot be considered a solution in itself. We need the cooperation of all the members of the international community in a coordinated operation devoted to the benefit of mankind and sponsored by the common goodwill of all its members. Organizational and preparatory actions for the attainment of these aims include financial and technical measures. The United Nations is the most important international organization to play an explicit role in attracting the attention of the world to the importance of this occasion, helping to make the event a moment of hope, peace, coexistence and prosperity.

The roots of each and every culture and civilization are involved in Bethlehem 2000. We must work together so that it can satisfy the rights of the people involved in the framework of self-determination, national sovereignty and independence. These are the reasons, among others, that call for strong and increased international assistance to the project. Allow me to say that celebration can lead the way to reconciliation and that only collective efforts will make a significant contribution towards a just and lasting peace in the region.

The Bethlehem 2000 anniversary celebration must be transformed into something that brings economic benefits to the Holy Land. The people living there have a right to benefit from the practical results of the economic prosperity that the project can bring them. In fact, some of these goals can be reached if we remember that Bethlehem 2000 implies the restoration of historical, archaeological and religious sites of importance. The Brussels Conference of 12 May 1998 counted among those who attended the European Commission, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Bank, all of which will help, or are helping by now, with logistical support and will stimulate cooperation between official and private entities. The United Nations must join these efforts, contributing to their relevance and bearing in mind that Israeli-Palestinian cooperation is essential for the success of the Bethlehem 2000 project. We must consider that Bethlehem 2000 is not a message limited solely to the Holy Land but is a universal message for the family of humans to live in harmony and peace.

We are at the gates of a new millennium that will bring to all the international community hope for a better world, a peaceful world, and will bring reconciliation and understanding among all nations and all regions. The project can become the first step in a long journey if we are able to convert it into a proposal for dialogue.

In concluding, the Sovereign Military Order of Malta would like to reaffirm its firm commitment to a just and comprehensive settlement in the Middle East, as stated in the Madrid and Oslo accords. To the fullest extent of its possibilities, the Order of Malta will continue to carry out its substantial economic and hospitaller work with a view to contributing to a prosperous future.

The Acting President: In accordance with the decision taken earlier, I now call on the Observer of the Holy See.

Archbishop Martino (Holy See): On 18 November 1998, this Assembly adopted without a vote the historic resolution 53/27, on Bethlehem 2000. The Holy See welcomes that initiative of the General Assembly and expresses its special, sincere appreciation to all who made it possible. My delegation equally commends the intention of the General Assembly to revisit this item at the dawn of the third millennium.

The President returned to the Chair.

The draft resolution before the Assembly on Bethlehem 2000 is rich in content and far-reaching in its application. It recalls in its first preambular paragraph that "the Palestinian city of Bethlehem is the birthplace of Jesus Christ and one of the most historic and significant sites on earth" and notes in the next paragraph that "the world will celebrate in Bethlehem, a city of peace, the onset of the new millennium in a global vision of hope for all peoples". It welcomes, in operative paragraph 1, "the impending arrival of the global, historic celebration in Bethlehem of the birth of Jesus Christ and the onset of the third millennium as a symbol of the shared hope for peace among all peoples of the world". It expresses support, in the next paragraph, "for the Bethlehem 2000 project and commends the efforts undertaken by the Palestinian Authority in this regard".

In line with the content of this draft resolution, my delegation would like to dwell mainly on three aspects of the agenda item "Bethlehem 2000", namely, the city of Bethlehem, the person born there, Jesus, and the message that Bethlehem conveys to all peoples of every age.

Bethlehem stands at the crossroad of history, giving us a profound vision of the past and pointing to a new

way of peace and hope. With the etymological connotation "house of bread", Bethlehem enters the annals of history in the fourteenth century B.C. For almost four centuries, it remained at the margins of history, until the tenth century B.C., when the great King David made Bethlehem "his house". After King David and until the beginning of this era, Bethlehem was almost left in oblivion. Still it contained a continued lineage of solid hope and unquenched expectation. The fulfilment of that hope and expectation was the birth of Jesus, son of David, in Bethlehem. Jesus' lowly birth gives Bethlehem its unique place in the mind and heart of the world. As Pope John Paul II has said, though the message of Bethlehem was, among other things, the promise of peace, Bethlehem's history since then has often been marked by violence. Yet millions will flock to the relatively small city of Bethlehem during the coming year in search of the peace, for themselves and for the world, that was announced at the birth of Christ.

Taking account of the religious, historical and cultural dimensions of the millennium event, the Bethlehem 2000 project, planned by the Palestinian Authority, is a laudable initiative. As Christ is the patrimony of all of humanity, so too Bethlehem, his birthplace, is the patrimony of humanity, and thus it requires special protection and guarantees that ensure free and unhindered access to the holy places in Bethlehem to the faithful of all religions and the citizens of all nationalities. The draft resolution on "Bethlehem 2000" clearly makes such provisions.

After decades of violence, what Bethlehem and its inhabitants need most today is peace. Peace delayed could become peace denied, and whichever side holds the peace talks back will be judged responsible by history for any resulting negative consequences and further escalation of violence. It is the sincere hope of the Holy See that all the actors will play their respective and relevant roles, so that the millennium may be celebrated most appropriately in an atmosphere of peace and reconciliation — not only in Bethlehem, but also in Nazareth, the Holy City of Jerusalem and elsewhere in the Middle East. The 5 September agreement of this year contains promising provisions in this regard, and we earnestly hope that they will be fully implemented within the given time-frame.

In the child born in Bethlehem of Judea, God identified himself with the poor and abandoned, the displaced and the refugee, victims of injustice and the outcasts from the mainstream of society of all ages and places. Jesus, born in Bethlehem and brought up in Nazareth in a carpenter's family, had one fundamental message for humanity: the message of love. He exemplified in himself the message of a serving love because he did not live for himself but for others. The concept of love found in the person of Jesus a new definition: self-giving. He sealed that definition with his own blood on the cross.

The vision of self-giving love includes everyone and excludes no one; it respects life and calls for the dignity of every human person; it provides an option for the poor and the oppressed; it demands justice for all and envisages the principle of solidarity in the world. It teaches that giving is loftier than receiving and calls for a new social order. Such a vision has to be the underlying current of the new era.

The spirit of Jesus' self-giving love lives on today and continues to inspire millions, as it has during the past two millennia. Hence, Jesus is not a religious leader of the past but a heavenly beacon of love and life for men and women who seek in darkness the sense of life and who suffer the wounds caused by the violation of the dignity of their persons. To a world possessed by egoism and introversion, Jesus of Nazareth makes his invitation for the conversion of hearts, and, in the midst of hatred and oppression, he intones the good tidings of fellowship and solidarity.

Bethlehem was the meeting place of heaven and earth where glory to God and peace to men of good will was proclaimed. The first visitors to experience God's peace in the manger of Bethlehem were the humble shepherds from the neighbouring valleys. The wise men in search of peace were also guided to that lowly abode by a star of hope.

The first truth about the peace announced in Bethlehem is that it is not man-made but God-given. At the same time, men and women are not merely beneficiaries of that gift but real actors in preparing the venue for that gift. Jesus himself calls the peacemakers "blessed" as he did those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. But only in humility, like the shepherds and the wise men of Bethlehem, will peace be given to us.

Peace is not merely the absence of war. It is growth in harmony, the growing of all of creation, with the human person at its centre, towards the Creator. If this harmony of essential and fundamental relations is disturbed, peace will become a mirage. Keeping the right relation between God and man and between man and

man — the vertical and horizontal dimensions of human life — is a precondition for peace.

Peace is possible only where a will to reconciliation exists. Hatred begets only hatred. Reconciliation requires courage and generosity. Letting the old wounds of hatred and violence bleed again is to deny peace a chance. The call to forgiveness was the final message of Jesus. Where the will to forgive prevails, war and conflict will find no place.

At the end of the second millennium, and in the wake of the divisions, wars, violence and atrocities that have often marked its years, the human family needs a moment of self-examination. It badly needs such a moment to realize the evil of which humanity is capable. It equally needs this moment to commit itself to a new life, devoid of egoism and hatred. Concretely, that means a resolve and commitment to a new ideal in life. If that ideal is the self-giving love exemplified in the person of Jesus, our entry into the new millennium will be a decisive and positive step in history.

The United Nations, by its very definition, is the organization holding the noble mandate of maintaining international peace and security. Yet no other world body is as aware as the United Nations of the difficulties in maintaining peace in the world. The awareness that peace is a gift of God would make the international community better realize its limitations and look for means to create the right environment for that gift to be received. That is exactly the role of this unique organization, and the start of the new millennium could be the propitious moment for entering into such an awareness.

The call of God to humanity two thousand years ago in the babe of Bethlehem is one of hope, not one of fear and anxiety. His extended and embracing hands are a symbol for all. Let self-giving love and God-given peace be the guiding principles for the human family entering the new millennium. And let it be especially so for the people in and around Bethlehem and throughout the Middle East.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/54/L.20. I should like to announce that, since the introduction of the draft resolution, the following countries have become co-sponsors: Armenia, Cameroon, Grenada, Panama and the Philippines.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/54/L.20?

Draft resolution A/54/L.20 was adopted (resolution 54/22).

The President: I call on the representative of Israel, who wishes to speak in explanation of position on the resolution just adopted. May I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by representatives from their seats.

Mr. Jacob (Israel): Israel welcomes with open arms the Christian pilgrims from across the globe who will come to celebrate the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus in the ancient land then known as Judea. The event will be a proud moment in the history of Christianity, uniting peoples from around the world on the very ground from which their heritage sprang forth.

As the nation that will play host to the thousands of pilgrims, welcoming them at our airports and hotels, our churches and historic sites, Israel is proud to take part in this momentous occasion. That is why, through the newly established Israel 2000 Authority, our Government has worked extensively to enhance facilities, hotels and roads as the date approaches. Moreover, Israel has invested close to $1 billion to make this event as fulfilling as possible for the Christian pilgrims.

The Bethlehem 2000 events are an integral part of this goal. The city of Bethlehem is just a few kilometres south of Jerusalem and a majority of pilgrims will likely be hosted in Jerusalem's many hotels. Thus, Israel's Bethlehem 2000 programme focuses extensively on improving lodging conditions in Jerusalem and on easing access and transportation between the two cities.

Cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority is essential. We would like to take this opportunity to welcome the recent convening of the Bethlehem 2000 Israeli-Palestinian Steering Committee, which met last week for the first time and is set to continue meeting on a weekly basis. This Committee was established in order to address all the relevant issues in a timely and efficient manner. A special focus will be movement and access to Bethlehem. We estimate that, from December 1999 to April 2001, Bethlehem will host an average of 10,000 visitors daily, who will require approximately 200 tour buses. In this context, Israel and the Palestinians have already begun implementing joint plans to improve and expand the main thoroughfare

leading to Bethlehem from Jerusalem, known as Route 300. Similar improvements are also being made in the crossing facility between Jerusalem and the Palestinian Authority-administered area of Bethlehem. Such steps will ease access to tourists and Palestinians alike, while continuing to ensure security for all.

These efforts to enhance the pilgrimage experience follow a proud Israeli tradition of promoting religious freedom. Since the establishment of the State of Israel, we have enabled all groups to enjoy the benefits of the holy places in our jurisdiction, making these sites the freest and most accessible they have been in two millenniums. The Christian community, for example, has enjoyed unlimited rights of religious activity, fulfilment and control in the holy sites of Jerusalem and Nazareth and others throughout the country. That tradition will help make next year's celebration of the birth of Jesus a more meaningful experience for all who participate.

But for some unfortunate terminology, this resolution could have reflected the universal importance of the Bethlehem 2000 project and received our unqualified support. An example of this is the resolution's reference to Bethlehem as a "Palestinian city". Although Bethlehem was, during the time of Jesus, a Judean city, the political and legal disposition of the city today is still pending the negotiated permanent status agreement between the sides. We would have preferred that this Assembly avoid taking a position in its resolutions that prejudges the outcome of negotiations now under way.

It is our hope that the spirit of cooperation between peoples and religions reflected in our joint plans for the year 2000 will, in the end, prevail. We will endeavour to do our utmost, even in these deliberations, to protect the uplifting spirit of Bethlehem 2000. That is why Israel has joined the consensus on the resolution just adopted, despite its reservations.

The President: I call on the representative of Slovakia on a point of order.

Mr. Gabriel (Slovakia): Slovakia aligns itself with the statement of the European Union delivered by the representative of Finland this morning.

The President: I call on the observer of Palestine, who wishes to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine): Our request might seem unusual in the context of the normal procedure in the Assembly, by which a certain delegation may not make a complete political statement in explanation of vote. However, I want to say briefly how delighted we are that the draft resolution has been adopted by consensus. I just want to add that our talk on Jerusalem must be based on the fact that Jerusalem is an integral part of the occupied territories, to which the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 applies.

This is a question that has been debated at length in the Security Council and in the General Assembly in previous years, and is debated even to this day. Without going into detail, allow me to say that we cannot accept the allegations made by the representative of Israel regarding Israel's behaviour towards the holy places and the Christians, in particular Palestinian Christians.

Finally, it is regrettable that the representative of Israel has expressed his objection to describing Bethlehem as a Palestinian city in the draft resolution just adopted. This is another example of the Israeli position regarding a Palestinian city, all of whose inhabitants are Palestinians. Even that city has been objected to by the representative of Israel.

Bethlehem has been described as a Palestinian city, but the representative of Israel thinks that it should be subject to negotiations. This problem will continue as long as the Israeli occupation goes on in the Holy Land, and as long as Israel continues to take illegal measures that run counter to international law and the resolutions of the Security Council.

We would have preferred not to have taken the floor on this point, because we are taking a new look at the future, which is full of hope, in view of the historic commemoration of Bethlehem 2000. As I said, I do not want to go into the details of this. I prefer that we all focus on this great positive event that has been achieved today, Sir, under your presidency: the adoption of the resolution.

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 36?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 17 *(continued)*

Appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments

(i) Appointment of the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services

Letter from the Secretary-General to the President of the General Assembly (A/54/531)

The President: I should like to draw the attention of Members to the letter from the Secretary-General issued as document A/54/531. In that letter, the Secretary-General informs the General Assembly that consultations regarding the appointment of the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services have not yet been concluded.

The Secretary-General further informs the General Assembly that, as the term of office of the current Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services is due to expire on 14 November 1999, and pending completion of the consultations regarding his possible successor, he has decided to request Mr. Hans Corell, Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, the Legal Counsel, to oversee the Office of Internal Oversight Services. This temporary arrangement is not expected to be a prolonged one, and the Secretary-General will submit a name to the General Assembly shortly for its consideration and approval.

May I take it that the General Assembly takes note of the letter from the Secretary-General?

It was so decided.

The President: We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of sub-item (i) of agenda item 17.

Agenda item 37 *(continued)*

Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development

Draft resolution (A/54/L.16)

The President: As members will recall, the debate on agenda item 37 was held at the 28th, 30th and 31st plenary meetings, on 6, 7 and 8 October, respectively.

In connection with this item, the Assembly has before it a draft resolution issued as document A/54/L.16.

I now call on the representative of Chile to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.16.

Mr. Tapia (Chile)(*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the 116 sponsors listed in the draft resolution, I have the pleasure to introduce the draft resolution entitled "Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development", contained in document A/54/L.16, under the General Assembly's agenda item 37. Guinea and Togo should be added to the original list of sponsors.

The draft resolution that my country has submitted on this occasion reaffirms once again the commitments undertaken by the heads of State and Government at the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995, and it emphasizes the need to give highest priority to policies aimed at promoting progress and social justice, as well as the improvement of the human condition, on the basis of full participation by all.

The draft resolution also reiterates the need for effective interaction between economic and social policies, underscoring the need to invest in persons and their well-being, which is the only means of achieving the objectives of social development.

Bearing in mind that the preparatory process for the holding of a special session of the General Assembly to review the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development has begun its work broadly and comprehensively, as regards both the level of compliance with the Copenhagen commitments by Member States and possible new initiatives for better implementation of these commitments, the draft resolution that we are introducing this year focuses on emphasizing the progress achieved in the Preparatory Committee, which is already analysing substantive issues.

It also reaffirms once again that the objectives of the special session will be to reaffirm the Declaration and Programme of action agreed at the Summit and not to renegotiate them.

The draft resolution reiterates an invitation to Member States to participate in the special session at the highest possible political level and also reiterates the invitation to the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, to continue to contribute both to the preparatory process and to the special session, which will be held in Geneva from 26 to 30 June 2000.

As for the agreements reached in the Preparatory Committee, the draft takes note of the important decision adopted by that Committee regarding accreditation and modalities for participation of non-governmental organizations, as well as the arrangements for the special session recommended by the Preparatory Committee and

adopted by the General Assembly in decision 54/404 of 8 October 1999.

The draft also recalls that the special session will be entitled "World Summit for Social Development and beyond: achieving social development for all in a globalizing world".

Furthermore, regarding the work of the Commission for Social Development in the preparatory process, the draft recalls that the Commission will have the responsibility of acting as the forum for national reporting and of identifying areas in which the Preparatory Committee should study the possibility of adopting further initiatives.

The draft also expresses appreciation to the Government of Switzerland for initiating and conducting making arrangements for the special session, preparations that, in the view of my delegation, ensure the success of the special session.

Lastly, the draft decides to include in the agenda of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly the item entitled "Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the special session of the General Assembly in this regard".

Before concluding, I wish to thank all the delegations and the Secretariat for their commitment and their dedication to the draft resolution. My delegation also wishes to express very special appreciation for the excellent work accomplished by the Counsel of the Brazilian Mission, Mrs. Marcela Nicodemos who for the third year in a row led the informal consultations that brought about the final text of this draft resolution in an effective, professional and expeditious manner.

For our part, we reiterate once again the firm resolve of the Government and the Mission of Chile to continue to promote the process of following up the implementation of the commitments undertaken in Copenhagen, both in the context of the Preparatory Committee, over which Chile presides, and in the special session that we will be holding next year in Geneva.

My delegation hopes that, as in previous years, the draft resolution on this subject will be adopted by consensus in the General Assembly thus reflecting the firm commitment of the international community to the principles and objectives of social development.

The President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/54/L.16.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the draft resolution?

Draft resolution A/54/L.16 was adoption (resolution 54/23).

The President: The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 37.

Agenda item 106 *(continued)*

Social Development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family: follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons

Draft resolution (A/54/L.6/Rev.1)

The President: As members will recall, under agenda item 106 four plenary meetings devoted to the follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons were held on 4 and 5 October. In connection with this item, the Assembly has before it a draft resolution issued as document A/54/L.6/Rev.1, entitled "Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: a society for all ages".

I now call on the representative of the Dominican Republic to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.6/Rev.1.

Ms. Alvarez (Dominican Republic) *(spoke in Spanish):* I wish first of all to clarify the fact that this draft resolution was introduced in the Assembly on 5 October, in one of the four plenary meetings held as follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons. Today we simply wish to make a minor oral revision to the text, the need for which was brought to our attention by the legal services of the United Nations.

The revision should be made to the last clause of paragraph 17 of the draft resolution. In the fifth line, the phrase "through the Economic and Social Council" should be added after the words "General Assembly". Thus, the last clause of paragraph 17 should read as follows:

"and to report to the General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council on this issue during its fifty-fourth session".

With this oral revision, it is the hope of the sponsors that the Assembly will be able to adopt the draft resolution.

The President: I call on the representative of the United States for an explanation of vote.

Ms. Baskette (United States): The United States joins the consensus on this draft resolution on the understanding that the proposed World Assembly on Ageing will be funded entirely outside of the regular United Nations budget.

The President: I should like to announce that since the introduction of draft resolution A/54/L.6/Rev.1, the following countries have become sponsors: Armenia, Bolivia, France, Guinea, Israel, Italy, Malaysia, the Republic of Moldova and Senegal.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/54/L.6/Rev.1, as orally revised.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the draft resolution, as orally revised?

Draft resolution A/54/L.6/Rev.1, as orally revised, was adopted (resolution 54/24).

The President: We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 106.

Programme of work

The President: I should now like to make an announcement concerning agenda item 20, entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance".

I have requested His Excellency Mr. Jørgen Bøjer, Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations, to be the coordinator of the informal consultations on the draft resolutions under agenda item 20, and he has graciously accepted.

May I request those delegations intending to submit draft resolutions under agenda item 20 to do so as early as possible in order to allow time, if need be, for negotiations, with a view to reaching consensus on the draft resolutions.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.